DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 262 PS 023 629

AUTHOR Holland, Holly E.
TITLE High Strides (The Bimonthly Report on Urban Middle Grades). September 1994-June 1995.
INSTITUTION National Middle School Association, Columbus, OH.
PUB DATE Jun 95
NOTE 69p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Middle School Association, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370, Columbus, OH 43231-1672 ($4 per issue; 1-year subscription, $15).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT High Strides; v7 n1-5 Sep/Oct 1994-May/Jun 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents; Educational Change; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Teacher Education; *Urban Education; Urban Environment; *Urban Schools; Urban Teaching
IDENTIFIERS Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

This document, comprised of five issues of a newsletter published by the National Middle School Association, focuses on teaching concerns and practice in urban middle grades. Regular features of issues include an editorial section, a resources column, a "News to Use" section, and feature articles. The following are some articles presented in the issues: (1) "The Joy of Cooking: It's Time To Reread the Ingredients for School Change" (Holly Holland); (2) "Teacher Education Misses the Middle: Few Colleges Prepare Teachers To Lead Middle School Classrooms" (Phillip Walzer); (3) "This Does Not Compute! Urban Schools Lose Speed in the Technology Race" (Bill Zlatos); (4) "Setting Standards for Excellence: Math Goals Help Teachers Aim Higher" (Linda Jacobson); and (5) "Charting Its Own Future: Oakland's Jingletown Middle School Joins Charter Crusade" (David Livingstone Fore). (BGC).

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HIGH Strides
THE BIMONTHLY REPORT ON URBAN MIDDLE GRADES • Volume 7, No. 1 September / October 1994

# The JOY of Cooking

## *It's Time to Reread the Ingredients for School Change*

*By Holly Holland*

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American middle schools have eaten an alphabet soup of education reform initiatives over the past decade. Bites of cooperative learning. Gulps of block scheduling. Spoonfuls of teaming and interdisciplinary teaching. Four-course meals of state-mandated change.

But instead of feeling sated, many educators are complaining about heartburn. They've responded to education reform like grocery shoppers trying to decipher food labels: "Are these ingredients safe? What will it look like when it's cooked? How will I feel after I eat it? What's so bad about my regular meals?"

Good questions to ask in a supermarket. Good questions to ask in a school.

The problem is that education reform is not like fast food, where you can order the same meal all over the country and be reasonably assured that it will meet the public's standard of acceptable mediocrity. Education reform is more like a soufflé, requiring constant attention and skill. Like good cooks, teachers and administrators need to practice their techniques before they can produce a dish worth raving about.

But somewhere along the way, the message about education reform has gotten confused: too many people approach it as if it were a recipe from Dave Thomas' franchise cookbook instead of the more elaborate and satisfying dishes created by Julia Child.

"Often we find meaning only by trying something," Michael G. Fullan, dean of the faculty of education at the University of Toronto, writes in *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. "Successful innovations and reforms are usually clear after they work, not in advance."

Fullan talks about how schools usually go through a process known as the "implementation dip" when things

**COOKING** Continued on page 4

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# CONTENTS


**1** **Soup To Nuts**
Education reform isn't a recipe that cooks up the same throughout the country. Holly Holland studies the ingredients.

**6** **Reform Revisited**
What's happened to some of the promising reforms highlighted in previous issues of *High Strides*? Anita M. Seline and Anne C. Lewis update their progress.

**8** **Milwaukee Mulls Reform**
Five years and $1 million after major reforms began, Milwaukee teachers have good feelings, but little to show for the effort. Priscilla Pardini takes a look.

**10** **Great Expectations**
Louisville's Iroquois Middle School finds happy ending in Greek tragedy. Holly Holland sets the scene.

**12** **The Long Haul**
Norfolk's bold plan for district-wide middle school reform loses steam. Anita M. Seline reports.

**14** **Write On**
Eighth-grade students have improved their writing skills, but are still off the mark. A look at the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1992 Writing Report Card.

**15** **Stuck in the Middle**
Survey finds slow progress for urban middle school reform nationwide. Holly Holland provides the update.


***Next Issue:***
***Teacher Education—Missing the Middle***
*Teachers talk about national certification.*

**Cover Illustration** by Katie Sullivan.


**HIGH STRIDES Volume 7, Number 1**

**High Strides** is published five times a year by National Middle School Association, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370, Columbus, OH 43231-1672. Editorial offices are at 4004 Alton Road, Louisville, KY 40207, TEL 502-899-1924, FAX 502-899-1961. **High Strides** is a benefit included in all levels of NMSA membership. Other subscriptions: U.S. $15 yearly rate, $4 per issue; International: $25 yearly rate, $6 per issue. To order call 1-800-528-NMSA.

**Sue Swaim,** Executive Director
**Holly Holland,** Editor
**April Tibbles,** Production Manager
**Katie Sullivan,** Designer


## From the Editor

What do we mean by systemic reform in education? Is it just the latest buzzword, another weight to add to the bulging backpack of duties that school staffs have to carry around?

Well, yes and no. It is a buzzword, and it is a heavy responsibility. But rather than adding a burden to schools, systemic reform aims to lift the load by giving shape and meaning to change. It is not separate pieces of innovation—cooperative learning, site-based decision-making councils or interdisciplinary teams—but a well-developed strategy for using these and other techniques to help all students achieve at high levels.

Hayes Mizell, director of the Program for Student Achievement at the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in New York, said school districts involved in systemic reform are those that have asked and answered this question: 'Where are we taking our students?'

"Middle school reform is a process, not the result you are seeking," he said. "It is hard for a school to face the fact that it is not really taking its students to any specific destination, and equally hard for a school to acknowledge that where it is taking students is a destination of limited potential."

Or, in the words of Patrick Shields, senior policy analyst at SRI International in Menlo Park, California: "Systemic reform is driven first and foremost by a clear vision for what student learning should be...All pieces of the system are coordinated in some fashion in furtherance of that goal."

In reality, systemic reform doesn't happen very often. Many school districts around the country are using new strategies, but they frequently mistake procedural change, or tinkering with how a job is done, with systemic change, which requires a shift both in organization and beliefs.

"A great deal of restructuring has occurred in the last five years, but it hasn't affected anything because we've restructured the wrong things," Phillip Schlechty, president of the Center for Leadership in School Reform in Louisville, said in a recent issue of *Educational Leadership*. "We've got to focus our attention on the things that need to be restructured. Things that make a difference in what happens to kids in classrooms. Time, people, space, knowledge, technology. You've got to restructure the rules, the roles and the relationships that govern the way time is used."

In this issue of *High Strides*, we take a closer look at systemic reform. The places we've profiled have tasted success and failure. But their efforts usually have led to a greater understanding of what works—and what doesn't—in urban middle schools.

And that, after all, is what change is all about—daring to try something better.


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PHOTO BY KETH WILLIAMS

*High Strides editor, Holly Holland*

## Changes At High Strides

*By Sue Swaim*

After six years with the Education Writers Association, *High Strides* is moving to a new home. This marks the final issue that EWA will publish jointly with National Middle School Association as part of a year-long transition of ownership. Hereafter, NMSA will assume control of the publication.

We're pleased to announce the hiring of Holly Holland, former education reporter at The Courier-Journal in Louisville, as the new editor of *High Strides*. Holland, 35, brings a wealth of experience in both urban education issues and school reform. She has covered the Kentucky Education Reform Act since its inception, and was responsible for following the Jefferson County Public Schools, one of the country's largest urban school districts with about 95,000 students.

Holland is a former EWA board member. She has won many national and regional journalism awards including the recent Best of Gannett competition for a series on child poverty, for which she served as lead writer.

Holland's husband, John Herzfeld, teaches at an independent middle school in Louisville. Their son, Dylan, 6, attends the ungraded primary program at a local public school.

Beginning with this issue, we've made a few changes to *High Strides* that we hope will make the journal easier to read and use. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Our thanks to the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation for providing the funds to create and sustain this publication during its early years. We also want to recognize the enormous contributions made by EWA's executive director, Lisa Walker, former editor, Anne C. Lewis, and project coordinators, Bert Menninga and Anita M. Seline. They developed a product we're proud to continue.

## Letters To The Editor

**BLOCK SCHEDULING**

I think that *High Strides* is an excellent publication and continue to keep me on your mailing list.

I would like for you to cover block scheduling. Is block scheduling a panacea? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Can block scheduling be the answer to or help solve many of the problems in inner-city schools with at-risk students?

*—Lee Phillips*
*Assistant Principal*
*Burbank High School*
*San Antonio*

**FIRST TIME READER**

I have just read your last edition—my first time to read *High Strides*. I believe my principal put it on my desk.

It is excellent and informative.

*—Kay Ryan, RN*
*Barrington Middle School*
*Station Campus*
*Barrington, Ill.*

**"INSPIRING"**

I want to congratulate you on *High Strides*. I find your articles on real schools and staff inspiring—especially the last two issues with their emphasis on caring.

I am the author of the document you summarized in your last issue, "Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School and Community." I would appreciate your making note of this in your next issue. (It's also available free of charge by contacting Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 730 Harrison St., San Francisco, CA 94107-1242, telephone 415-565-3079.) Thanks for your understanding.

*—Bonnie Benard*

## What Do You Think?

We want to know what you think about *High Strides*. What issues would you like covered? What issues have we covered well? Please let us know in the space below or write us a letter.

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PHOTO BY DEAN MILLS

*Diana Dankowski*
*Chattanooga, TN*

PHOTO BY JIMMY JOE ... JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Ron Barber*
*Louisville, KY*

PHOTO BY SAN DIEGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Barbara Coates*
*San Diego, CA*

**COOKING** Continued from page 1

seem to get worse before they get better. Change is something that people have to "get good at," he says. "There is much more to educational reform than most people realize...It isn't that people resist change as much as they don't know how to cope with it."

Fullan and others believe that educators—and the public—have traditionally oversimplified the complex process of change. In doing so, they set up education reforms to fail because of unrealistic expectations and inadequate support. Instead of patting people on the back for completing another lap in the race, they grouse about how far they are from the finish line.

"Change is a process, not an event. Most of our efforts in education still treat it as an event," said Gene Hall, professor of educational leadership at the University of Northern Colorado and coauthor of the book, *Change in Schools*. "The legislature comes in and plops down reform and says, 'Oh, by the way, you need to have it all in place by Labor Day.' If there's any training, it's two days in August...There's not an understanding of how complex and subtle educational innovations are."

Phillip Schlechty, president of the Center for Leadership in School Reform in Louisville, said educators can't begin to suggest solutions unless they're clear about what the problems are. People need clear objectives and reasons to change, he said.

Otherwise, he said, "It's like trying to sell soap to people who don't believe in body odor."

Systemic change requires a new kind of leadership, he said, people who have been trained to coach, to inspire risk-taking, to foster flexibility in the use of time, people and space.

"Leaders need to give you the whole picture and tell you where you fit in, instead of just giving you your piece," Schlechty said. "We've got centralized trouble-making and decentralized problem-solving. It should be the other way around."

After years of trying to foster change in urban middle schools, Hayes Mizell is convinced that "district-wide collaboration among middle schools is essential for systemic reform...If the central office is not playing a constructive role in the dynamics of school reform, the whole venture may be stillborn."

Mizell, director of the Program for Student Achievement at the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in New York, believes that "there is great potential in every school and school system to develop and implement creative and effective reforms, but in most cases they need partnerships with external resources to help them overcome inertia, gain self-confidence and catch a glimpse of what is possible to achieve."

Though they've been actively engaged in systemic reform with assistance from the Clark foundation for just about a year, Chattanooga Public School officials have already learned that all the people who have a stake in the outcome of educational change must be involved in planning it. Diana Dankowski, middle school coordinator, said the district's restructuring team members were excited about the proposed reforms until they realized how isolated they were from their colleagues. The experiences that had helped motivate the team—out-of-town conferences, brainstorming sessions, time away from classrooms and offices—hadn't been available to others who would have to put the changes into practice.

*"It's like trying to sell soap to people who don't believe in body odor."*

Since then, the Chattanooga school district has set up study groups on topics such as alternative assessments so teachers can meet frequently and create their own staff development programs. Some groups have borrowed corporate boardrooms for meetings and used grants for food so participants could feel good about putting in extra hours for reform. The district also has formed a middle school network in which teachers meet monthly to share ideas and materials.

"Staff development has to be intensive and ongoing," Dankowski said. "Research shows that...it takes 50-60 hours per teacher to affect an internal change that will last...To have true reform, you have to do it systemically. We learned that."

Ron Barber, former principal of Western Middle School in Louisville and now senior associate at the Center for Leadership in School Reform, has found that many reforms fail because they are totally dependent on the support and energy of one or two people. So-called "institutional skeptics" wait until the maverick

superintendent, principal or teacher leaves and then quickly return to the comfortable and familiar, he said.

"You have to have discussions in a community about *why* do we have to change. Is this trip really worth it? Is all of this necessary?" Barber said.

"The technical parts of restructuring are simple. It's the interpersonal relationships that are difficult."

Other veterans of education reform agree that attitudes are critical to making change work. Intransigent staff members can sabotage reform efforts.

"In truth, people who choose to be educators usually were successful in education. They are more likely to model what worked for them," said Barbara Coates, principal of Kroc Middle School in San Diego, which was selected last year as a "break-the-mold" school by the National Alliance for Restructuring Education, one of five projects that are funded by the National Center for Education and the Economy.

"The problem is, we're changing not for those who did well but for the huge numbers who aren't."

In San Diego, Coates said she has seen the polarization of the district's 22 middle schools—a split between those that are changing and those that are actively resisting reform.

"The most resistant are those where there is still enough (students) for whom the old ways still work, mostly white, middle-class kids," she said. "For the ones it doesn't work for, they can blame the victim: 'It's not my teaching. It's these kids' fault.'"

And yet, Coates believes it's a mistake to ignore resisters. Change won't last if it's pushed only by maverick and younger teachers, she said. She recalled a group of teachers at Kroc last year who confronted a colleague about his negative interactions with students and poor classroom management. The teachers asked the man to leave their team, she said, and he eventually quit teaching altogether.

"Before, we would have shut our doors to that kind of problem," Coates said. "We've always known that some teachers were like that, but we have tended to just let it go. Now we know that you're only as strong as your weakest link." ■

*Holly Holland, former education reporter at The Courier-Journal in Louisville, is the new editor of High Strides.*

# The Reform Connection

Middle school educators are invited to apply to The Reform Connection '94, an interactive conference for leaders of middle school reform in urban districts. The conference is sponsored by the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta through a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. It will be held Nov. 2-3 in Cincinnati just prior to the National Middle School Association's annual meeting Nov. 4-6.

The conference uses interactive sessions where educators can reflect candidly on their work in classrooms. Any team of two or more teachers, principals or central office leaders may apply to present their reform initiatives, including a discussion of triumphs, frustrations and future plans.

Suggested topics include the most effective ways to help urban students achieve, the impact of reform on students and teachers and how districts can spread reform initiatives among all middle schools.

Applications for the conference are due Sept. 15. However, if you must register after that date, please telephone the council.

The conference is free for a limited number of educators whose schools currently receive Clark Foundation grants; the cost is $100 for all others. To get the best hotel rates (not included in the conference fee), applicants should make reservations through National Middle School Association.

For more information, contact Barry Lee or Marcia Klenbort at the Southern Regional Council, 134 Peachtree Street N.E., Suite 1900, Atlanta, GA 30303. Telephone: (404) 522-8764. Fax: (404) 522-8791. NMSA's telephone number is 800-528-6672.

# Resources

*Transforming Education: Overcoming Barriers*, by Jane L. David and Paul D. Goren, National Governor's Association Publications, P.O. Box 421, Annapolis Junction, MD, 20701. 48 pages. Send $15 plus $4.50 shipping and handling.

*Sustaining Change in Schools: A Role for Business*, by Diana W. Rigden, Council for Aid to Education, Publication Dept., 51 Madison Ave., Suite 2200, New York, NY 10010. 51 pages. Copies are $25 prepaid.

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Hayes Mizell, director of the Program for Student Achievement, 250 Park Ave., New York, NY 10177-0026. TEL 212-551-9116.

Center for Leadership in School Reform, Phillip Schlechty, president, 950 Breckenridge Lane, Louisville, KY 40207. TEL 502-895-1942.

# Reform Revisited

*By Anita M. Seline and Anne C. Lewis*

School reform is difficult to measure, harder to sustain. Systemic change, involving entire school districts, comes slowly, often not at all.

PHOTO BY STEVE SCHNEIDER

*Student teacher Brian Plancich, helps Melashu Teklemichael, who is from Ethiopia. Melashu attends Meany Middle School in Seattle.*

Six years ago High Strides began telling readers of exemplary programs where educators were implementing reforms including intensive teacher training, multi-ability classes and parent involvement—programs that aimed for high expectations, high content and high support. In this issue, we revisit some of those programs to find out what happened. We wanted to see if the changes had affected systems—within schools or within districts. Here's a look at some of the programs:

**Mark Twain Middle School, San Antonio, TX**

The Frog Pond is gone. Housed in portable classrooms set apart from the main school building by a dip in the yard that often filled with water, this team-taught program for a multi-age group of the students most at risk of failing ended its experiment last year.

For a good reason. The rest of the school's instruction now resembles what the three pioneer teachers in the Frog Pond attempted. All teachers are now working on teams, instruction is interdisciplinary, and the teachers "are learning to work on the whole needs of children," said principal Nancy Harlan.

When the 70 students who had attended the separate program moved back into regular classrooms, "they were scared, not because of academics but because they were not sure they would behave right," Harlan said. There have been few problems, and "a lot of surprise on the part of the regular teachers as to how well prepared the students were for academic work."

Although no formal study has been conducted, the Mark Twain staff knows anecdotally that graduates of the Frog Pond have stayed in school at higher rates and performed better than expected.

Meanwhile, Mark Twain has become one of four mentor schools for a Texas middle school network that was funded by the Carnegie Corporation. Mark Twain has a three-year grant to develop an interdisciplinary, thematic curriculum, initially involving Harlan and 13 teachers, but soon to become schoolwide.

Once among the lowest performing schools in the district, Mark Twain accomplished "a dramatic increase on the Texas assessment last year, double and triple in some areas," according to Harlan. "We are pretty far ahead on middle school reform."

**George Middle School**
**Portland, OR**

As the school year ended last June, a former student of Ginny Rosenberg's dropped by to ask for a written recommendation for a college scholarship. "This was one of the angriest, toughest kids I ever had," Rosenberg said. "I told her that she had gone from throwing chairs, to sitting in them, to being in charge of them."

Such small successes gratify Rosenberg, whose in-school program for the most at-risk students at George Middle School focuses on combining academic achievement with personal responsibility. She does this primarily by linking students to the community. For example, students study a variety of animals that live in Rosenberg's classroom, then give lectures about them to younger students and senior citizens.

Recently, the students have been working on socially responsible environmental projects. In one study they found that chemicals had so contaminated the Columbia Slough that fish were inedible; a report on the project was featured recently in *Ranger Rick* magazine. National park and environmental groups have visited Rosenberg's class to observe the hands-on instruction for environmental education.

Rosenberg's program received the Program of the Year Award from the Alternative Education Association. Her work is still outside the mainstream curriculum, but Rosenberg is satisfied that alternative education has survived despite several massive budget reductions by the school district.

"We're hanging in," she said.

**Puget Sound**
**Professional Development Center,**
**Seattle, WA**

Originally designed as an intensive preparation program for middle school teachers, the Puget Sound center flourished at first. No longer—the program ended in June.

"In the fifth year, it's dead," said Nathalie Gehrke, former director of the center.

The center aimed to teach future instructors how to work on teams while providing leadership and mentoring opportunities for veteran teachers. An early evaluation found that students who completed the program benefitted. One graduate went on to teach in Oregon and was named teacher of the year at his high school.

The goal was to create partnerships between the University of Washington, which started the program, and the middle schools that participated. But the university's commitment to the program waned, Gehrke said. By the end of last year, university funding had been discontinued. Other support groups lost power and interest, and the junior faculty members at the university who ran the program saw few rewards for their efforts, she said.

"There's nothing uncommon about what went on here. The problem is that it hit us sooner," she said. "I wouldn't have involved six years of my life if I thought this was going to happen," Gehrke said, adding that she hopes to write about the experience one day to "figure out what someone else can do to save the agony."

**Key School**
**Indianapolis, IN**

About eight years ago, Patricia Bolanos and several teachers began planning the Key School, an elementary school designed to focus on Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligence. The idea is that children learn in different ways—some visually, some orally, for instance—and instruction should be tailored to fit their needs.

Last year Bolanos expanded the concept and opened the Key Renaissance Middle School with 100 students. Enrollment will grow to 150 this school year. Both the elementary and middle school have long waiting lists.

Bolanos is particularly happy with one middle school project. Twenty students were matched with mentors in careers they were interested in. The students shadow their adult sponsors up to several hours each week. One student, paired with a local architect, drew up floor plans for an expanded Key School.

There have been some problems this year, Bolanos said. Two of the school's seven teachers asked for transfers because they were uninterested in the Key style of teaching, despite participating in weekly staff development programs.

**REFORM** Continued on page 16

PHOTO BY STEVE SCHNEIDER

*Student teacher Tice Hamblett helps Meany Middle School student Justin McLey with computer skills.*

MILWAUKEE

# "A Vastly Different Place" After Clark

## But Some Say Reform Fell Short of Expectations

*By Priscilla Pardini*

MILWAUKEE, Wis.—In June 1989 the Milwaukee Public Schools scored an impressive victory, winning one of five competitive national grants from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, which directed $12 million toward middle school reform over five years. In Milwaukee, Kosciuszko and Parkman middle schools received an infusion of staff training and technical assistance.

But five years and about $1 million later, there is little evidence that the money and the reforms have made a difference in Milwaukee.

Student achievement is generally lower than before the project started at the two schools, based on standardized test scores. Staff and student turnover is still high. Teachers, many of them admittedly rejuvenated by their experiences with the Clark project, worry that they'll fall back into old habits without continued encouragement and support from an outside group. And there is skepticism that the initiatives spearheaded by Clark will spread to other local middle schools.

Despite the negative prognosis, however, school and foundation officials believe that their efforts in Milwaukee were not in vain. They point to intangible successes, albeit gains that are hard to measure in conventional ways.

"I know it sounds like we fell flat on our faces," said Al Hunley, learning coordinator at Kosciuszko, "but we didn't. When you look at attitudes, school climate, new things teachers are trying, this is a vastly different place than it was five years ago."

Belle Tomasello, staff development specialist at Parkman, believes the project made a difference to a beleaguered staff: "Never have we had so many teachers learning as much as we did under Clark."

Although Milwaukee will not receive more money from Clark—only two of the five school districts, Louisville and San Diego, received additional funds—Clark officials do not view the Milwaukee experiment as a failure.

"I think these schools are in a much stronger position than they were five years ago," said Hayes Mizell, director of Clark's Program for Student Achievement. "Are they where they need to be? Certainly not. But they are in a position to build on this experience in ways that could be significant."

In some ways, Milwaukee's experience is typical of the way education reform plays out in many urban schools. Change takes time and a great deal of energy, two things often in short supply in schools plagued by poverty, violence and apathy. Kosciuszko and Parkman both have large numbers of economically and educationally disadvantaged students, high absentee rates and little parent support for education. Both schools are located in neighborhoods with high crime and poverty rates. Both have had a record of academic failure and low staff and student morale.

The Clark initiative, however, was designed to eliminate the excuses for failing to try reforms in urban schools. The hope was that in giving troubled urban schools the type of funds and support that more successful schools receive, many of the barriers to achievement would fall. The foundation called on the schools to "develop and support an education of high expectations, high content and high support to disadvantaged youth in the middle grades." Officials hoped that the 12 schools in the project would try out promising practices and spread their successes to other schools.

A review of the project's first four years found higher achievement, as measured by test scores, in Baltimore, Louisville and San Diego. The report also cited the three cities for having strong central office support for middle school reform. The report cited Milwaukee only for challenging students with more rigorous content, as evidenced by the larger number of students enrolling in algebra and pre-algebra classes.

In Milwaukee, the nearly $1 million earmarked for Kosciuszko and Parkman was spent largely on teacher training, helping staff members understand strategies such as peer mediation, career counseling and portfolio assessments. The money paid for trainers and substitute teachers, travel to professional conferences and bonuses for teachers who put in extra hours.

Brenda Leake, an associate professor of education at Trenton State College in New Jersey who consulted with the two schools, said she's seen a great deal of growth and a new sense of professionalism among staff members. Those gains should pay off for students, she said.

School officials in Milwaukee point to a number of possible reasons why student achievement has not improved so far. School reform often is slow to reap results, they said. In addition, they said, student turnover runs 35-40 percent a year at Kosciuszko and 30-50 percent at Parkman. With so many students coming and going every year, Parkman and Kosciuszko often are penalized for the test scores of students they've barely taught.

Some people also have raised questions about using standardized test scores to judge the success of the Clark initiative in Milwaukee.

"Clark is doing what everyone else is doing," said Al Basak, learning coordinator at Parkman. "They're looking only at standardized test scores because people in the educational community understand standardized test scores. We know our kids have made gains. It's just a matter of finding ways to measure them."

Another factor in Milwaukee's weak performance under the Clark initiative: an almost unbelievable degree of principal turnover—three different principals at each of the two schools in five years. The staff at Parkman and Kosciuszko cited problems with some principals they describe as incompetent and dictatorial leaders who failed to support the Clark initiative.

PHOTOS BY JACK DILTON

"There were factors relating to morale that negatively impacted on those schools that even Clark money couldn't overcome," said Priscilla Kuehn, who coordinates middle school curriculum for the Milwaukee school district.

In looking back over the past five years, the staff at Kosciuszko and Parkman talk about the strides they made in meeting their original goals of increasing expectations and support for students. Kathy Januchowski, a resource teacher at Kosciuszko, takes pride in a program that developed through the Clark grant in which each staff member serves as an adviser/mentor for about 15 students.

Val Wiebeck, who teaches science to eighth-grade students at Kosciuszko, helps run the Clark-inspired career linking program.

"We saw some wonderful things happen with our children that would never show up on test scores," she said. "For the first time we're tying what the children are doing in the classroom with what happens in the real world."

For Laura Barton, who teaches math and social studies to sixth graders at Kosciuszko, being able to receive training in cooperative learning has changed the way she teaches.

"When I went to college, cooperative learning wasn't a big thing," she said. "I always just had the kids in rows and they pretty much worked out of their books. But now, with cooperative learning, they're working together, and I find they're more willing to attempt problem-solving than when they had to work on their own."

Donna Ford, an eighth-grade math teacher at Parkman, credits Clark with giving her and other teachers an almost unheard-of opportunity to travel around the country and meet with colleagues.

Yet, Tomasello, Parkman's staff development specialist, fears that without the Clark money many programs will be eliminated and teachers will slowly begin "pulling back into their own classrooms and into their own ways of doing things again."

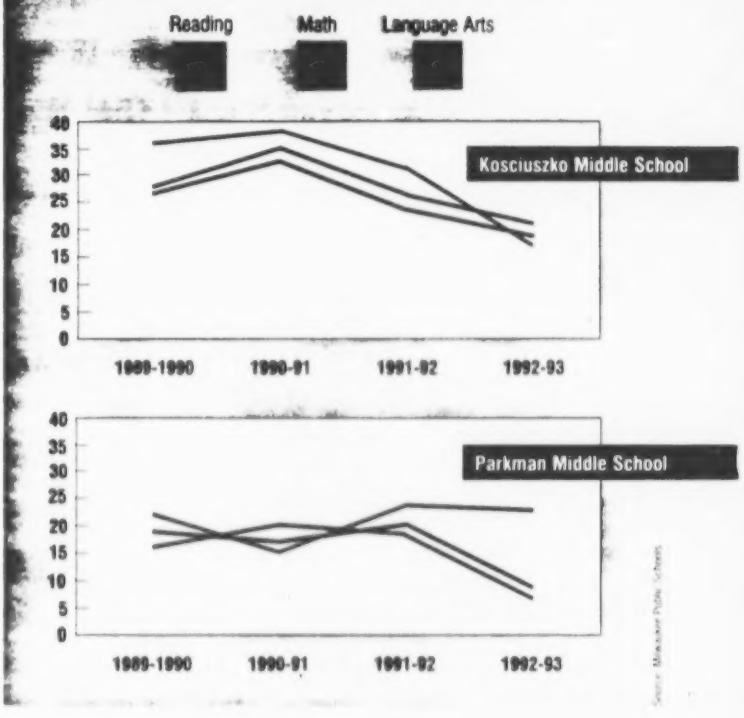
Milwaukee administrator Kuehn said she believes that some programs could be continued with help from the school district. Mizell, the Clark official, hopes she's right.

"I think we have nourished the soil at these two schools," he said. "And now the question is: Is someone going to do something with it and reap the harvest?" ■

*Priscilla Pardini is a Milwaukee-based writer who specializes in education.*

## ACHIEVEMENT & REFORM

These graphs show the percentage of seventh-grade students who scored at or above the 50th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.



*Al Basak*
*Parkman Middle School*

*Kathy Januchowski*
*Kosciuszko Middle School*

*Belle Tomasello*
*Parkman Middle School*

*Laura Barton*
*Kosciuszko Middle School*

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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

*By Holly Holland*

# Iroquois Middle School Finds Happy Ending in Greek Tragedy

**Editor's Note:** *How many times have you heard the remark that urban middle school students aren't very capable? That the poverty, violence and deprivation in their lives provide excuses for mediocrity? That the primary job of educators in urban settings is to keep adolescents safe and out of trouble?*

*A growing number of middle school educators are challenging those assumptions. They believe that high academic achievement is both the right and the responsibility of every student. They believe that urban students can grasp sophisticated concepts through rich and engaging instruction that puts them in charge of their own learning.*

*With this issue of High Strides, we introduce a regular feature called Great Expectations. It will highlight the practical experiences of teachers who set high goals for their students — and give them the tools to reach them.*

LOUISVILLE, Ky.—What relevence does Greek tragedy have for a group of urban seventh graders? It depends on how you teach it.

Read a play like Euripides' *Medea* straight from the text and you're likely to find heads plopping on desks by the end of the first hour. Treat it like drama and you might see energized students making modern-day connections. Jealousy, betrayal, murder, insanity—if adolescents tune into television to see them acted out, it's probably a short trip to 431 B.C.

For several months last school year, Cheri Lineweaver and Dena Kent let their Iroquois Middle School students build their own bridges between the past and present. By combining science, social studies, math and language arts, the teachers—with help from math teacher Mike Richardson—immersed the 90 students on their team in Greek history, literature, architecture and law. The final product was a full-length play, "Medea on Trial," that the students wrote, staged and performed.

To pay expenses, the Iroquois students wrote their own grant applications to a local Foxfire chapter and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, earning $800. They consulted a dance instructor, a drama coach and law students to help them interpret the play. They also sold program advertising, did historical research, built sets and sewed costumes.

In the original play, Medea kills her two sons after her husband, Jason, leaves her for another woman. The students' version puts Medea on trial for murder. They used flashbacks and a fog-making machine to move between the modern courtroom setting and the tragedy that unfolded 2,000 years ago. The musical score included songs by Reba McEntire, Madonna and Meat Loaf.

During performances, the audience—which included students from other middle schools—was asked to participate as jury members who would determine Medea's fate.

"I really got into it," said Magan Pearson, who played Medeain the present. "At first, I didn't know that I would be able to get into the character. She was so sad and I'm usually happy. I did it with concentration and thinking about sad things.

"Ms. Kent, she was really demanding...She wanted us to do our best."

Another student, Chris Stucker, said he worked with an instructor from the Louisville Ballet to improve his performance on stage.

"It was a lot of work, but it was more funner," Chris said. "You get to think about your ideas and use them...The way they put the courtroom in, it showed that a lot of what they did back then wasn't that much different than with us."

"Teachers have said to us, 'How did you get seventh-grade boys on stage dancing?'" Lineweaver said. "There was never any thought on our part that they wouldn't...We expect them to do their best. We tell them up front, 'You're going to work harder than you've ever worked before, but you're going to have fun, too.'"

Kent said the play was part of a building process, helping the students to trust their talents. Earlier in the year, she said, the students dove into drama by staging scenes from the *Phantom of the Opera* while a national touring company was performing the Broadway play in town. Over time, Kent said, the students gained freedom as they learned to accept more responsibility for their learning.

"The school day isn't just about academics," Kent said. "It's also about responsibility and community...My goal as a teacher and a parent is to create independent people. If you can't let them make mistakes and make choices, how can they become independent? It starts at this age."

Kent and Lineweaver also believe the project has prepared the students well for Kentucky's new assessments, which include portfolios and performance-based tests. On a practice test (formal tests are given statewide in grades four, eight and 12), seventh-grade students were asked to evaluate a speech of their choice. Many students said that Medea's defense speech was the first they'd ever heard in school. The Iroquois students devoted one of their portfolio entries to Medea, essays that Kent said included some of the students' best work to date.

"I'm a firm believer that experience provides the content that you need for distinguished writing," she said. ■

PHOTOS BY TAMMY JONES/JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Iroquois Middle School teachers Dena Kent, top, and Chen Lineweaver, bottom, believe students from all backgrounds can achieve at high levels.*
*Left: Iroquois seventh-grader April King stars as Medea in the past in the student-written play "Medea on Trial."*

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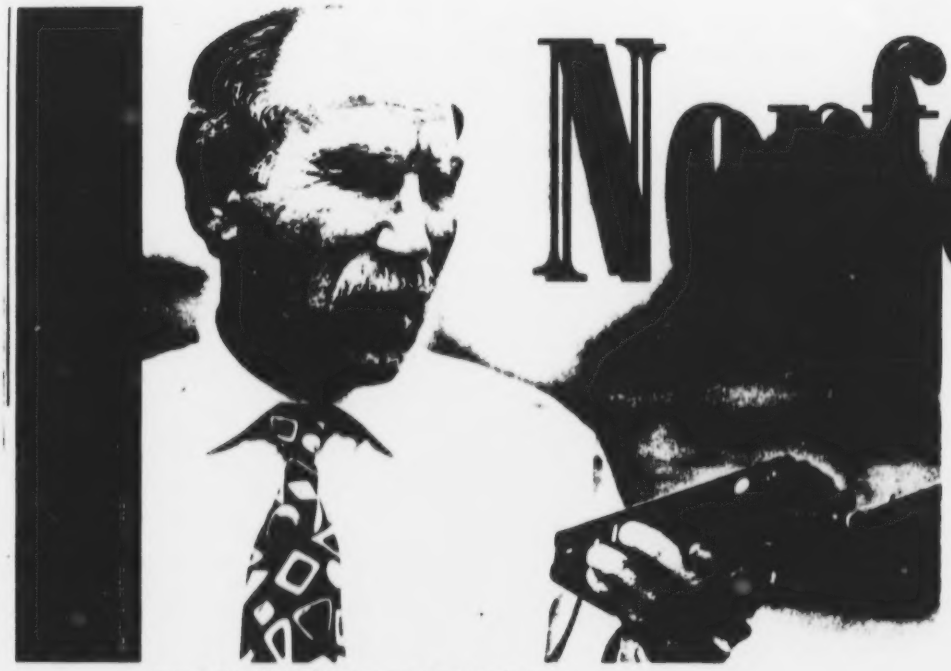
## LESSONS LEARNED

- Build faith on a daily basis so students will trust you to lead them through increasingly harder work. Adolescents usually want some assurances that they'll be successful before they'll try something new. "You do it a little at a time," Lineweaver said. "Give them the background knowledge they'll need. Give them strokes."
- Model risk-taking. Kent talked about the risks involved in starting a new novel with her students at the end of the school year. The students had little confidence that they could understand or complete the book. To boost their confidence, she gave them an early quiz loaded with questions she knew they could answer. She also helped them brainstorm key issues in the book. "I thought you said you didn't understand this," Kent said she told her students. "Look at all the information you know."
- Find the natural leaders in each class and develop strong relationships with them. They will help you build support with [illegible]
- Expect quality. "If you don't have high expectations for them, nobody will," Lineweaver said. "We don't accept second [illegible]"



# Norfolk

## The Tough Task of Turning Around Troubled Schools

*By Anita M. Seline*

*Azalea Gardens Middle School principal Frank Steadman*

NORFOLK, Va.—Frank Steadman knows first-hand how tough it is to achieve systemic reform in a school district.

Three years ago, when he became principal of Azalea Gardens Middle School here, Steadman took on one of the more difficult places in the district. Students were out of control, and teachers were more interested in instilling law and order than implementing education reform.

For Steadman, it was quite a culture shock after having served six years as principal of Norfolk's Northside Middle School, an award-winning school where some of the reforms that district administrators had developed for the city's middle schools had taken root and begun to flower.

The contrast became startlingly clear to Steadman one Monday morning at the beginning of his tenure at Azalea. Two groups of girls brought a dispute to school that had been festering over the weekend. Boys quickly chose sides with the girls, and the two groups began fighting in the hallways, setting off a series of brawls that lasted about 10 minutes.

"I had a riot at that point," Steadman said.

He called the police, who arrested 30 students. Steadman also suspended dozens of students, some for three months.

At a faculty meeting later that day Steadman was greeted with applause from the teachers. He said he later heard some students talking about him.

"One said, 'Don't mess with that man. That man is crazy,'" he said. "The message was getting through."

Steadman hoped that once he regained control of the school he could move Azalea's faculty away from a preoccupation with discipline and into a discussion about how to best teach children. But the process has taken far longer than he expected. Although he remains optimistic about achieving reform, Steadman acknowledges that he has not been able to transfer many of the ideas to Azalea that he found to be successful at Northside.

"Some [changes] haven't gone so well," he said.

Like many urban districts, Norfolk has had uneven success with middle school reform. Lofty goals have gotten mired in the trenches. Good ideas haven't always kept pace with the chaotic flux of problems that troubled children bring to school. Effective teaching strategies have run head-long into the concrete of tradition.

Not that Norfolk hasn't tried. But the district has had to deal with two extremes of reform in turning around its eight middle schools: how to motivate schools like Northside to continue changing for the better, and how to persuade schools like Azalea that they should bother trying.

"We're not where we want to be. I'll be the first to tell you that," said Shirley B. Wilson, Norfolk's assistant superintendent for secondary schools. "We've done a lot of staff development, but you don't change attitudes quickly."

In the early 1980s, amid concerns that many students were performing below grade level, Norfolk officials embarked on a mission to change its junior high schools to middle schools. Before making the change, however, Norfolk administrators read reams of material on middle schools and visited schools around the country. They formed a task force to develop a middle school philosophy and a reform plan. They also hired consultants to help them carry out the plan.

One consultant, Nancy Doda, has mixed feelings about the Norfolk effort. Doda, president of Teacher to Teacher, a Burke, Va., firm specializing in middle level reform, said school officials talked extensively about reform but didn't seem committed to long-term change. The district never appointed a full-

time director of the middle school initiative, she said. And she doubts that anyone explained to teachers and principals how deep educational change must go and how long it takes to work.

Doda recalled how Norfolk officials herded all the formerly junior high school teachers into a hot auditorium for an hour one day so Doda could explain the concept of team teaching. The teachers had not been prepared for the lecture, Doda said, and the stifling, uncomfortable conditions made learning less than ideal.

To help with the reform effort, Norfolk also brought in Larry Lezotte, senior vice president of Effective Schools Products Limited in Michigan. Lezotte believes that an effective school is one that has strong leadership, a good climate for teaching, strong parental involvement, an emphasis on teaching students essential skills and regular monitoring of their progress.

In Norfolk, each middle school enlisted the help of a school improvement team with subcommittees set up to deal with specific tenets of the Effective Schools model. A district-wide improvement team also formed.

Lezotte said that in the early 1980s, when he started working with Norfolk, he was impressed with the leadership, the sentiment for change and the commitment to staff development.

"The intent and the passion is not nearly what it was four or five years ago," he said. "They've gone on to focus on different things. The whole effort has lost its focus.

"Some of the innovations have been pretty conservative. They haven't gotten down to the re-engineering level that I thought they'd be doing by now."

Margaret Saunders, the assistant superintendent for instructional support services who was in charge of the district's middle school task force for several years, acknowledges some failures. The district's standardized test scores have not increased at the middle school level, she said, one of the goals of the reforms. But Saunders does see some intangible gains. And though some staff members are tired and burned out she believes most people still see the need for reform: "I think we have the stick-to-itness to do it here. You just don't improve and stop. You have to keep saying, 'Let's keep looking at this.'"

Marcia Klenbort, who has studied middle school reform for the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta, said Norfolk's experience is typical of what individual schools experience when the district demands change.

"The central office does not have the power to make things happen at the school level," she said, other than by offering incentives or threats. "It can only hold out carrots. It can hold out whips."

It's difficult for teachers and other school personnel to accept change, Klenbort said, especially in urban schools where they're so busy dealing with pregnancy, violence and a host of other student problems.

"You want them to have whole-school views, but that's hard for them to do that unless they feel satisfied with what's going on in their classroom," she said.

In Norfolk, where Steadman is preparing for another year at Azalea, he points to some promising signs that a turnaround is still possible. Older students who once prowled the hallways have been promoted to high school, he said, and school enrollment has stabilized now that white students are no longer leaving in droves.

And Steadman, who used to be a reform purist, finds he has changed too. He is more willing to accept that some reforms just don't work in all places.

"I know where I'm going to end up," he said, "but I don't know how we're going to get there." ■

PHOTOS BY PETER D. SUNDBERG

*Top: Azalea student Chris Bilberry monitors students as they enter and exit the school's cafetena.*
*Bottom: Northside assistant principal Brenda King congratulates a student who has just aced a test.*

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# Doing The Write Thing

## *Nation's Writing Report Card Better, Still Off The Mark*

*By Holly Holland*

Greater attention to writing in America's classrooms has helped many students improve their ability to communicate, but students and teachers will have to work harder to reach higher standards.

That's the conclusion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress 1992 Writing Report Card, which was released in June. It shows that students in grades four, eight and 12 improved since the 1988 Writing Report Card was issued. For example, the number of children in the eighth grade who received at least an hour of writing instruction each week rose from 70 percent in 1988 to 85 percent in 1992.

But even students who wrote the best informative and narrative pieces had trouble preparing arguments and evidence in persuasive writing tasks; only a handful of eighth-graders and 1 percent of 12th graders wrote persuasive papers that were placed in the top two scoring categories. And fewer than 20 percent of students nationwide could write at an "elaborated" or well-developed level on any kind of writing assignment.

"Writing is starting to get the attention it deserves," U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley said in a statement when the report was released. "We know how to fix the problem, and the elements are in place for a long-term stategy of reform...If I am troubled by anything in this study, it is the large gap in writing skills between the best students and the poorest students."

The report, from the National Center for Education Statistics, found that the average writing proficiency of students in the bottom one-third of schools was four years behind students in the top one-third of schools at grades eight and 12.

The 1992 Writing Report Card asked nationally representative samples of fourth-, eighth- and 12th-grade students—a total of 30,000—to respond to persuasive, narrative and informative writing tasks. Students completed two 25-minute writing assignments or one 50-minute assignment as part of the assessment. Scoring was based on six graduated levels: response, the lowest score, which indicates that the student responded in some way to the task; undeveloped; minimally developed; developed; elaborated; and extensively elaborated, the highest score.

The report also included information from questionnaires completed by teachers and administrators. According to the surveys, middle school principals said two-thirds of eighth-grade students had teachers who emphasized writing instruction. However, eighth-grade language arts teachers said a majority of their students spent only about two hours a week writing in class or at home compared to about five hours a week on math. ■

*(The 222 page report is available by calling the Government Printing Office Order Desk at 202-783-3[illegible])*

## 7 Keys to Teaching Good Writing

- Assign various kinds of writing, especially about literature.
- Allow students to select their own topics.
- Ask students to write lengthy pieces of three or more pages.
- Expect students to plan their writing and work through several drafts.
- Focus on quality and creativity, while improving grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Practice writing skills while learning other subjects.
- Encourage students to read, write and discuss work at home.

Source: NAEP 1992 Writing Report Card

# Stuck in the Middle

## Survey Finds Slow Progress for Urban Middle School Reform Nationwide

*By Holly Holland*

In one of the most comprehensive surveys to date of urban middle school reform nationwide, the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta has found that while all school districts struggle with change, their experiences are shaped by unique local factors that both favor and inhibit growth.

"There's nothing generic about reform," said Marcia Klenbort, director of educational programs for the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta. "Each (district) takes cues from what its strengths are, and each one has to figure out how to get over their particular stumbling blocks."

In some cities, for example, unions have blocked attempts by teachers to work more hours than the contract allows. Not wanting to openly challenge the unions, teachers have had to work on reforms in secrecy.

In other cities, political conflicts in the central office often mean people are too preoccupied to pay attention to middle schools. Some principals have become so frustrated by the negligence that they've sought national honors—such as being named Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education—to give school staffs the recognition they deserve.

The Southern Regional Council also found that many districts have been reluctant to use the words "reform" and "change" lest they imply an effort to discredit the past.

"They talk about 'building,' 'growth' or 'renewal,' but not reform because it may seem to shortchange efforts they've made or that others have made before them," Klenbort said.

Beginning last December, the council sent surveys to 270 school districts with more than 20,000 students each, at least 30 percent of whom are non-white. To be included in the survey, a school district had to serve a sizeable city and the majority of its adolescent students had to attend schools with a 6-8 grade configuration. Of the 270 districts contacted, 100 returned the nine-page survey. The council sought more detailed information from 30 of those 100 districts through extensive telephone interviews.

The project was funded through a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in New York. Hayes Mizell, director of the Program for Student Achivement at Clark, said one of the goals was to identify school districts that the foundation might support in the future. The survey was not meant to be scientific, he said, but rather to present a broad gauge of the state of urban middle school reform nationwide.

"I think it's not as far along as one would like," Mizell said. "That didn't really surprise me. A lot of school boards and superintendents in urban settings don't understand middle schools. It's been said before that middle schools tend to fall through the cracks. There's good evidence that is still the case."

The council's report is scheduled to be published in September. To obtain a copy, send $5 to the Southern Regional Council, 134 Peachtree St. N.E., Suite 1900, Atlanta, GA 30303-1864. The telephone is 404-522-8764 and the fax is 404-522-5791. ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF CORPUS CHRISTI INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Nancy Cancino, seventh-grade science teacher at Martin Special Emphasis School, shows Diana Aguirre (center) and Fatima Campos (right) how to measure pH balance. The Corpus Christi School District has been active in reform.*

*Key Renaissance School students work with career mentors at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Top: Green house supervisor Hollis Schuh demonstrates repotting to Hanna Able, a seventh-grader. Bottom: Photographer John Geiser shows Johnnie King, an eighth-grader, how to load film.*

**REFORM** Continued from page 7

Bolanos also is concerned because Indianapolis Superintendent Shirl E. Gilbert II resigned in May; she fears that another superintendent may not be as supportive of the Key School. Bolanos hopes to eventually expand the Key School to include grades K-12.

### Greenway Middle School Pittsburgh, PA

Five years ago this school was a training center for Pittsburgh's middle school teachers. Two years later the training program was eliminated because of budget cuts, and Greenway was converted to a regular middle school. Similar programs for elementary and high school teachers also were eliminated.

While the center was open at Greenway, teachers from around the city spent four weeks training with instructors who were considered among the best in the state.

"It was very expensive" because the school district had to pay for so many substitute teachers, said Pat Crawford, spokeswoman for the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Before the program ended, she said, only about half of the district's middle school teachers had been trained at Greenway.

### Regents Challenge for Excellence in Middle-Level Education Program New York State

This three-year-old program was designed to give schools greater flexibility in developing programs that would match instruction to students' varied learning styles, use new teaching strategies and involve parents in their children's education. Initially 50 middle schools — about 30 percent of them in urban areas — participated.

The initiative developed from the New York Regents' Action Plan adopted in 1984, which increased academic requirements and changed the curriculum for seventh- and eighth-grade students. During the three-year project, participating schools were eligible to receive waivers from state regulations to carry out programs that were consistent with the Regents' standards.

Unfortunately, the project was never funded and there has been no statewide effort to track its progress, said David Payton, supervisor of middle-level education for the state.

But changes were made in some schools. Bob Pedzich, principal of Monroe Middle School in Rochester, said all but 100 students are placed in heterogenous classes as part of an effort to eliminate academic tracking. The other students are taking high school credit courses.

The school met another of its goals by grouping seventh- and eighth-grade students together to concentrate on math and English skills. At the end of the year, if they have met the exit standards, they are promoted to ninth grade. The passing rate has exceeded 90 percent, Pedzich said.

School officials said they have been frustrated by the state's neglect of this project.

Pedzich said he remembers spending a lot of time with other staff filling out a state evaluation in the first year of the program, hoping for feedback. They never received any.

"I would have loved to know what other schools were doing, if change was really happening," he said, adding that the school didn't bother filing out an evaluation in the second year. ■

*Anita M. Selme, a Washington, DC-based writer, is the former project coordinator of High Strides. Annie C. Lewis is an education policy writer based in Glen Echo, Md. and the former editor of High Strides.*

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Columbus, Ohio 43231-1672

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HIGH Strides

THE BIMONTHLY REPORT ON URBAN MIDDLE GRADES Volume 7, No. 2 November / December 1994

# Teacher Education Misses the Middle

## Few Colleges Prepare Teachers To Lead Middle School Classrooms

*By Philip Walzer*

NORFOLK, Va. — The assignment was straightforward: Test and assess an adolescent student's reading skills. Later, in class, more than two dozen teachers-in-training at Old Dominion University dissected their case studies and swapped ideas about how to reach the students.

They talked about Logan, who was getting As and Bs in school but scoring dreadfully low on reading comprehension. And Derrick, who had to cope with insults about his weight from siblings and jabs about his abilities from his parents.

"His mother would say, 'You don't like to read. You always mess up,'" complained student-teacher Christie Boyd. "And the whole time we were testing, the T.V. was on."

The university students were even more troubled about Robin who was reading at grade level but without much interest.

"She doesn't read often," said student-teacher Sandra Drillock. "I asked her why she doesn't, and she said she just didn't like it."

PHOTO BY PETER D. SCHOENBERG

*Jane Hager makes a point in the middle-grades reading class she teaches at Old Dominion University in Virginia*

The reading class at Old Dominion followed standard themes in teacher preparation, but it is by no means common among education courses at American colleges. That's because it was tailored to middle school teachers.

Old Dominion is one of only 22 universities in the country that have fulfilled the guidelines for middle school education recommended by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the professional accrediting agency for teacher education based in Washington, D.C. Only one-third of all colleges of education have any courses geared to middle school teaching and few have added them in the past few years, said C. Kenneth McEwin, a professor and middle school consultant at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. There are good programs around the country, he said, just not enough.

"It's a very serious problem," said Peter C. Scales, director of national initiatives at the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The age group is neither young children nor older teens, yet that's what teachers who teach them are being trained to teach.

"If you had a surgeon coming in to do an appendectomy who had not done extensive reading on appendectomies and had never seen an appendectomy being done, you'd be shouting malpractice. That's essentially what we've done with a majority of these teachers."

Just 17 percent of middle school teachers report having had

TEACHER EDUCATION Continued on page 4

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# CONTENTS


**1** **Missing the Middle**

American colleges and universities have been slow to meet the need for middle grades teacher preparation. Schools with well-established programs demonstrate the difference as Philip Walzer takes stock.

**3** **Great Expectations**

In our regular feature on schools that set high expectations for urban students, Anita M. Seline looks at how one San Diego middle school boosts esteem and achievement through student portfolios.

**6** **Staff Development Showdown**

Studies show that teachers forget 90 percent of what they learn in typical one-shot workshops. The National Staff Development Council and others urge more follow-through. Holly Holland tells why.

**7** **Teacher Resurrection**

Middle school teachers in Louisville have discovered that they are their own best resource for staff development. Holly Holland writes about their experiences.

**8** **Partners in Reform**

Teams from eight New Jersey middle schools find inspiration, promise—and yes, some headaches—in the two-year-old Partners in Learning Middle Grades Project. Maisie McAdoo updates their progress.

**10** **National Certification**

Gail H. Mancini catches up with a group of middle grades teachers who were among the first to test the National Board Certification conducted by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

**5** **Resources**

**12** **Letters to the Editor**


***Next Issue:***

***The technology race—can urban schools compete?***

*Middle grades students lead national effort to preserve the environment.*


**HIGH STRIDES Volume 7, Number 2**

High Strides is published five times a year by National Middle School Association, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370, Columbus, OH 43231-1672. Editorial offices are at 4004 Alton Road, Louisville, KY 40207. TEL 502-899-1924, FAX 502-899-1961. High Strides is a benefit included in all levels of NMSA membership. Other subscriptions: U.S. $15 yearly rate, $4 per issue; International: $25 yearly rate, $6 per issue. To order call 1-800-528-NMSA.

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## From the Editor

Pick a state, any state, and you'll find a different set of standards for preparing teachers. Move down to the school district level and you'll find another series of requirements for staff development or, worse, none at all.

Are teacher preparation programs helping to improve instruction? How much does good training cost? Have programs been realigned to support education reform inititatives around the country?

Those questions have been raised more frequently in recent months as federal, state and local governments struggle with the twin concerns of fiscal constraints and the need for better teaching. The Clinton administration has made teacher training a priority of its education agenda including the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Around the country the stakes have never been higher as the federal government — and some states — begin holding teachers accountable for ensuring that expensive education reforms succeed.

"Unfortunately there is no road map to in-service training or staff development," said Chris Pipho with the Education Commission of the States in Denver.

The commission found that out quickly this past summer, Pipho said, when researchers began studying the impact of staff development, particularly in Kentucky, which has backed a massive school reform measure. In passing the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990, for example, state legislators increased the number of paid teaching days for professional development from zero to four and, recently, to nine. Kentucky has earmarked $26 million over the next biennium for staff development.

But in most states, Pipho said, "we have no idea what is spent on staff development" and whether it's making a difference. We don't know which of the dozens of educational strategies being touted by organizations and consultants around the country offers the most promise, he said. And likewise, no one knows whether education does better or worse than other professions in keeping its practitioners on top of current research and trends. Pipho said the commission's preliminary report should be completed in January.

In light of the national attention, we've turned the *High Strides* spotlight on some important staff development efforts around the country. In this issue you'll meet prospective teachers in Virginia who are lucky enough to attend one of the few colleges in the country that prepare people specifically to lead middle school classrooms. We visited teachers and principals from New Jersey who have learned the hard way that changing staff behaviors has everything to do with making educational reforms work. We talked to teachers from Louisville, Ky., who used extensive staff training to reach some of the toughest students in the school district. And teachers around the country who've tried their hand at national certification, an effort to define, through standards and practice, what it means to be a good teacher.


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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

*By Anita M. Seline*

PHOTO BY ANITA M. SELINE

*Ngoc Nguyen, right, presents her eighth-grade portfolio to her sister Bich Nguyen and math teacher, Byron King.*

## At San Diego's O'Farrell, Student Portfolio is Ticket to Graduation

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — Eighth-grader Nysheka Snowten remembers feeling butterflies in the pit of her stomach when she presented an end-of-year portfolio of her school work to a panel consisting of her teacher, her friend and her aunt.

"I was nervous. I had a paper clip in my hand and I tore it up," Nysheka said.

Nysheka, now a freshman, was among about 400 eighth-grade students at O'Farrell Community School who presented portfolios at the end of last school year as a requirement for promotion. The portfolios represented the students' assessment of their best work, especially assignments that demonstrated their improvement over time. Sixth- and seventh-graders also keep and present portfolios, though their presentations are not tied to advancement.

Nysheka, a shy student who transferred to O'Farrell in eighth grade, had trouble adjusting to the school's unusual grading procedure at first. But with encouragement from her teachers, she soon was filling her portfolio with revised homework, a record of her volunteer work in the community and a poster she designed urging a halt to toxic waste dumping.

Her math teacher, Byron King, said Nysheka is an average student whose portfolio allowed her to shine while creating something that was distinctively hers.

"I felt good about myself," Nysheka said.

Helping students develop high self-esteem through high achievement is the cornerstone of O'Farrell's philosophy. The school does not use academic tracking to sort students by ability but, instead, prepares all students to take college-preparatory courses in high school. O'Farrell has a diverse student population that is roughly one-third Filipino, Pacific Islander and Indochinese, about one-third black and the rest Hispanic and white.

When O'Farrell opened as a San Diego magnet school five years ago, students began compiling portfolios because teachers wanted to help them develop self-evaluation skills and contribute to their own learning. In addition, teachers wanted a more detailed picture of students as learners instead of the hazy images they saw in test scores and traditional report cards. O'Farrell students get progress reports during the year but not a report card with letter grades.

Teachers said students who never believed that their studying would amount to anything usually change their minds after watching their portfolios fatten during the year.

"Portfolios force students to look at their learning," said language arts teacher Kelly Peacock-Wright.

Because O'Farrell's experience with portfolios is so new, school officials are still measuring the impact on student achievement. They do know that graduates score well on standardized tests and usually enroll in advanced math courses in high school. At one San Diego high school, for example, 80 percent of the students who had graduated from O'Farrell in 1992 were enrolled in algebra or higher-level math courses compared to 50 percent of the students who had attended other middle schools. Figures for O'Farrell's 1993 graduating class are not available.

O'Farrell's portfolio requirement has several parts. Students must articulate "The O'Farrell Way," which asks them to focus on learning, respect the rights of others, and be kind to themselves and others. Students must document that they spent at least 12 hours a year in community service such as cleaning up a local playground. They must complete an extensive research project, give a school tour to visitors and demonstrate competence in reading, writing and math. They also must show progress overall; evidence can include revised assignments from any subject.

During her end-of-year presentation, eighth-grader Ngoc Nguyen said she had had a difficult time completing a research project on hate groups.

"What was hard for me to do was to get started on it," she said. "I was lazy, and I put it off."

Her older sister, Bich, who served on the evaluation panel, asked Ngoc how she could improve.

"Start on it early, read books about it and have more information," Ngoc said.

During her presentation, eighth-grader Shari Pajarillo analyzed her year in school while her parents looked on. She leafed through her flowered notebook and pulled out examples of writing and math homework.

"This is something I put together myself," Shari said. "It shows the work I did and how I've grown." ■

*Anita M. Seline is a writer based in Washington, D.C.*

**TEACHER EDUCATION** Continued from page 1

special preparation for teaching adolescents, according to Scales' 1992 study, *Windows of Opportunity: Improving Middle Grades Teacher Preparation*. More than half said they were prepared "inadequately or poorly" in such cornerstones of the middle school approach as cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching and teacher-based guidance.

"Most of these people end up being excellent teachers," McEwin said, "but they have to practically teach themselves to deal with young adolescents."

Marilyn Burns, 50, who teaches English at Schwab Middle School in Cincinnati, has seen two generations grapple with this problem. In the late 1970s, she got a degree in elementary education from Western Connecticut State College with no middle school training. In June, her daughter, Virginia Spencer, 24, who also aspires to teach English in a middle school, got a degree in secondary education from Ohio University. Same story.

"I would have liked to see a methods course for the middle school or junior high setting," Spencer said. "But I never had a professor say, 'This will

n't spawned many more college programs targeting this age group, said Arthur E. Wise, president of NCATE. The latest push for middle schools started in the late 1980s, Wise said, and universities have been slow to change.

But researchers mostly blame state governments for the lack of progress in middle school teacher preparation. Few states require middle school certificates to teach in middle school. In his study, Scales said that 35 states offer middle-grades certification, but 32 of them overlap with elementary or secondary certificates.

"Colleges offer specific teacher preparation programs in response to state regulations, rather than the other way around," Scales said. "And what states have done is staple the middle grades on the end or the beginning of elementary or secondary certificates."

or will not adapt to junior high schools.' It was kind of touch and go."

Researchers don't know of any studies that have correlated the success of teachers with the training they received in college — that's the next project McEwin and Scales hope to tackle. But they believe that the shortage of middle-level training can't be helping.

"A lot of discipline problems come from inappropriate instruction," said Janet E. McDaniel, who oversees the middle school preparation program at California State University-San Marcos. "When I started teaching eighth grade, I thought they could sit still for 45 minutes and hear me drone on about the Peloponessian War. It was ridiculous. Of course they had discipline problems...But if you know young adolescents and plan appropriate instruction for them, you won't have to deal with so many problems."

Why have universities been slow to develop middle-grades programs? When junior high schools were the norm, they often were considered miniature high schools; sometimes they shared buildings with high schools, especially in rural areas. Consequently, many educators didn't see the need to differentiate teacher training.

Yet the growing movement to create wholly separate middle schools has-

Scales said principals and superintendents "like to be able to get more grades out of the same individual. It gives them more flexibility."

McEwin said some local unions also have resisted attempts to split up certification for teaching kindergarten through eighth grade fearing that the changes would reduce the employment opportunities of their members.

In *Growing Pains: The Making of America's Middle School Teachers*, a new study released last summer, Scales and McEwin did find some good news: most colleges with middle school programs have strengthened those options. The researchers also found that more schools planned to develop specific middle-level teacher preparation programs in the near future.

Well-developed middle school programs such as those at Old Dominion and the University of California-San Marcos offer a vision of what many educators hope

to see at other colleges in the future. At both universities, the middle school program lasts for about a year. It includes seven to eight classes and a semester's worth of student teaching — at a middle school, of course.

Old Dominion's curriculum includes courses in "Human Growth and Development," "Intervention Strategies for At-Risk Students" and "Research in the Middle Schools," in which education students focus on particular problems they've identified at schools where they have been student teaching.

In the middle-grades reading class she teaches at Old Dominion, Jane M. Hager, associate dean of the Darden College of Education, stresses novels, such as "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden," that were written for young teenagers or that feature adolescents as central characters.

McDaniel, at San Marcos, encourages student teachers to develop activities that keep adolescents from getting restless such as a role-playing exercise in which they can re-enact the westward movement by playing a Native American or pioneer.

"We know young adolescents can't sit still for a long time," McDaniel said, "so we need to plan instruction to keep them active — cooperative learning, projects,

*Old Dominion student-teacher, Lisa Smith (left), records the results of reading tests, while student-teacher, Ted Coleman, recalls a funny moment with a middle school student. Right, Jane M. Hager, confers with student-teacher Rich Collins.*

PHOTOS BY PETER D. SUNDBERG

pairing them up. They can get out of their seats and create and discover and make things in groups."

To drive home the philosophy, San Marcos teaches most of its middle-school education courses at a middle school, and the university instructors team-teach.

At Old Dominion, student-teacher Boyd said she has gained new insights about adolescent students.

"Their joints are growing," Boyd said. "That's why they're fidgeting at their desks, not because they're bad students."

Randolph Booth-Pharr, a former hospital administrator who graduated from Old Dominion last June, said the middle school program changed his view of student discipline.

"Most of these kids are bigger than you are, but they're still children who do childish things," said Booth-Pharr, now teaching social studies at Blair Middle School in Norfolk. "A teacher has to be flexible. You have to understand where the kids are coming from." ■

*Philip Walzer covers higher education for The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star.*

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# Resources

*Growing Pains: The Making of America's Middle School Teachers*, by Peter C. Scales and C. Kenneth McEwin. Published by National Middle School Association and the Center for Early Adolescence. $15. To order call 1-800-528-NMSA.

*The Professional Preparation of Middle Level Teachers*, edited by C. Kenneth McEwin and Thomas Dickinson. Profiles 14 middle level teacher preparation programs. Available from NMSA in 1995.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) provides lists of schools, departments, and colleges of education that have met the teacher preparation guidelines of the professional associations that monitor national standards of excellence in their fields. Call NCATE at 202-466-7496.

NMSA has compiled a list of about 70 well-established middle grades teacher preparation programs at the bachelor's, masters, and doctoral levels. To obtain the list, call 1-800-528-NMSA.

*National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development, Middle Level Edition*, PO Box 240, Oxford, OH 45056. TEL: 800-727-7288. The middle level edition costs $12 for council members and $15 for others. Includes a study guide.

*Focus on the Children: Middle Schools Resource Guide*, a 150-page loose-leaf binder of successful classroom strategies, interdisciplinary ideas and curriculum guides to boost student achievement. The book was compiled by middle school teachers in Jefferson County (KY) in conjunction with the Center for Early Adolescence in North Carolina and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in New York. The cost is $15. Contact Howard Hardin, 3332 Newburg Road, P.O. Box 34020, Louisville, KY 40232-4020. TEL: 502-473-3551. FAX: 502-473-3821.

Princeton Center for Leadership Training, 997 Lenox Drive, Suite 304, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-2317. TEL: 609-844-1040. FAX: 609-844-1011.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 300 River Place, Suite 3600, Detroit, MI 48207. TEL: 313-259-0830. FAX 313-259-0973.

O'Farrell Community School, San Diego, Byron King, Bob Stein, TEL: 619-263-3009.

# Staff Training Gets a Second Look

*By Holly Holland*

Staff development for middle school teachers typically runs like this: an outside expert puts on a half-day program, answers a few questions from the audience and then leaves town. The teachers return to their classrooms having fulfilled state or school district requirements for time spent in training, but few of them have absorbed information that's likely to improve their instruction.

If the session was particularly interesting, the teachers might try out a new strategy or two. But with no one to help them practice and no one to turn to when strategies seem to fail, teachers quickly return to form.

"The reality is that we have a lot of people in schools who are not prepared to teach in them," said Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council in Oxford, Ohio. "There's a mismatch between the preparation and the challenge...We get so caught up in big things like restructuring, it's only as an afterthought that we recognize that people are involved."

PHOTO BY TAMMY JONES, JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Western middle school teachers, Virginia Hendon, left, and Carol Eddings, right, read through strategies presented at a summer workshop in Louisville.*

Good staff development, Sparks and others argue, supports a school's goals, aims to change behaviors and includes long-term support. Above all, good staff development recognizes that teachers, like professional athletes, still need good coaches.

"Typically, efforts to help teachers modify their practice focus on experiences outside the classroom, such as summer institutes, university course work and in-service workshops," writes Barbara Scott Nelson, director of the Center for the Development of Teaching, in Newton, Mass. "Far less attention is paid to teachers' efforts over the subsequent months and years of examining and changing what they actually do in the classroom."

Studies show that teachers forget 90 percent of what they learn in one-shot workshops. It takes about 20 follow-up sessions to ensure that teachers can apply their new skills in the classroom. Although more educators recognize the need to take a broader approach to staff development, many are confused about how to proceed. The National Staff Development Council, in collaboration with seven other national associations, recently released national standards that aim to give districts some direction. The middle school edition is the first of three to be developed.

The standards call on districts to commit to continuous staff development, and to develop programs that are grounded in research, "so staff can understand the process of change and how to work collaboratively to solve problems and make decisions."

The challenge for the nation is enormous. About 75 percent of all teachers have been on the job 10 years or more, meaning that staff development is about the only way to pass on new research and strategies.

"In addition, staff development is no longer viewed as something that is only necessary for teachers," the report says. "We now recognize that everyone who affects student learning, from the board of education, central office administrators, principals, teachers, to classified/support staff, and parents must continually improve their knowledge and skills."

Such comprehensive staff development is admittedly time-consuming and expensive, said Sam Totten, an associate at the Center for Middle Level Education, Research and Development at the University of Arkansas. The center runs an intensive, multi-year summer institute coupled with follow-up sessions during the school year in which the participating teacher and principal teams can discuss problems and successes. The institute's faculty, which includes classroom teachers, visits schools during the year to help with implementation. Totten, a former principal, believes that providing broad and sustained support for middle grades educators is the only way to make changes stick.

"It does cost money," he said, "but I think that principals and districts, if they are committed, can find the resources." ■

# RESURRECTION:

## Louisville Teachers Reborn as Lifelong Students

PHOTOS BY TAMMY JONES / JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Beverly Bimes-Michalak. Bottom right, Iroquois Middle School teacher Emma Fant*

**Four years ago, when Beverly Bimes-Michalak began working with teachers at three neglected middle schools in Louisville, she was determined to make their experiences better than her own.**

A former National Teacher of the Year who later helped develop the Writing to Learn project, Bimes-Michalak remembers being energized after attending a summer writing program when she was still teaching in Pennsylvania. But when she returned to school that year, she was frustrated to learn that officials expected her to immediately impart her new skills to teachers throughout the district.

"I was just learning myself," said Bimes-Michalak, who lives in Bird-In-The-Hand, Penn. "I didn't have time to think about it and process it. How could I teach others?"

She wanted someone to guide her as she tried out new strategies, someone who would provide constructive criticism and encouragement. It was a lesson she took to heart when she started working with teachers in Louisville through a multi-year, middle school reform project initiated by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in New York. Although she assists teachers from around the county with Writing to Learn, Bimes-Michalak cites Louisville as a shining example of how support, extensive follow up and teacher-driven training can transform schools.

"Staff development works in Louisville because it's not imposed on teachers. They have ownership," she said. "I don't know how many superintendents (around the country) have said to me, 'Just give me a Writing to Learn book and I'll give it to the teachers and be done with it.' There's not one staff development program that will meet the needs of every urban district."

In Louisville, Bimes-Michalak said, teachers and principals "have done the hard work of taking the pieces and putting them together for their population. And they have enough self-respect to know that the answers are within."

Student achievement has risen at Iroquois, Southern and Western middle schools — once considered havens for teachers and administrators who were either inexperienced, demoralized or out of favor with the central office. The staffs have received strong endorsements from researchers who have studied the reform process for the Clark foundation.

"Teachers once disillusioned with professional development now see the power of intensive programs for reform in their schools," wrote Anne Wheelock, of the Center for Innovation in Urban Education at Northeastern University in Boston, in her recent report, "Empowered Teachers, Empowered Learners."

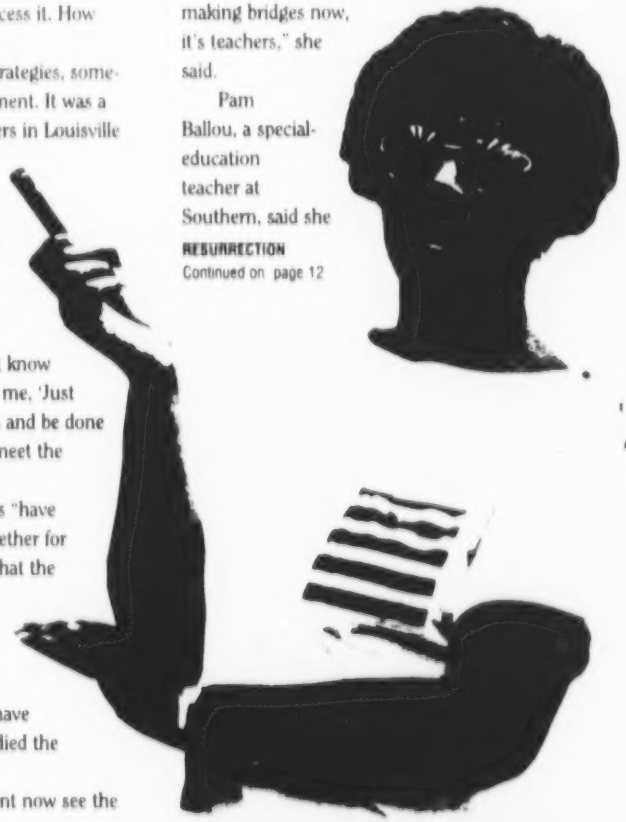
This summer and last, teachers at the three schools designed and conducted their own intensive training sessions in several subjects, workshops that now attract a waiting list of teachers from around the school district. But the staffs at Iroquois, Southern and Western don't stop learning in the summer. They meet monthly during the school year to practice strategies such as Socratic dialogue that they're using with their students. This fall, the district's middle school teachers published a 150-page curriculum guide that includes strategies they've researched and practiced.

Maria Cissell, who teaches social studies at Southern, led a seminar last summer that grew out of brainstorming sessions with teachers at three schools.

"It's not just kids making bridges now, it's teachers," she said.

Pam Ballou, a special-education teacher at Southern, said she

**RESURRECTION**
Continued on page 12



# Partners in Reform

## New Jersey Program Gives School Staffs Support For A Change

By Maisie McAdoo

PHOTOS BY RUSSELL HOMICKER

*Grover Cleveland Middle School Teacher, Ronald Cradle*

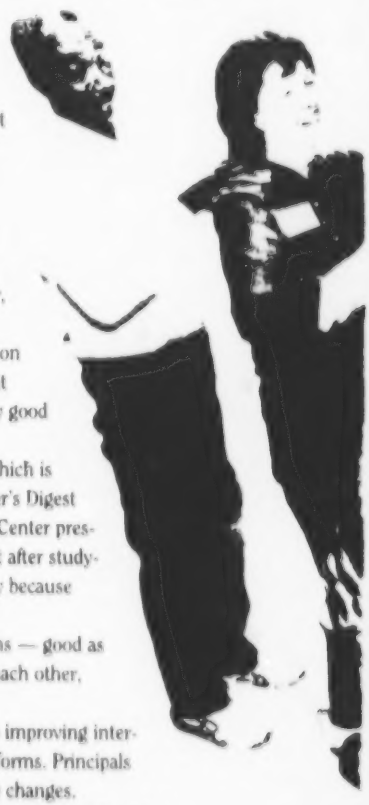
NEW BRUNSWICK, New Jersey — On a sweltering July afternoon at a Rutgers University conference center here, a leadership team from Grover Cleveland Middle School in Elizabeth, New Jersey, is planning its second year of participation in the Partners in Learning Middle Grades Project, a school reform effort that focuses on staff development.

The air conditioner may have given up on this day, but team members have not. Teams from Grover Cleveland and seven other New Jersey middle schools are sweating through discussions about faculty meeting agendas, parent involvement projects and new teaching methods.

The school staffs weren't always so gung-ho about reform. When the district superintendent first proposed the Middle Grades Project to Grover Cleveland's faculty in 1992, "no one was interested," recalls social studies teacher Michael Tehan. Grover Cleveland, which serves mostly poor students in an aging industrial city, had "bottomed out," according to principal, Deborah Dixon. Students' scores on state exams and the California achievement tests were so bad "they couldn't get any lower," speech teacher Linwood Bagby said. Faculty, students and parents were dispirited and disinterested.

But Dixon liked the sound of the Middle Grades Project, which is run by the Princeton Center for Leadership Training in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, a non-profit organization that aims to improve teacher and student leadership. The program was designed to help school staffs commit to change by having ownership in the planning and outcome of reforms. Dixon rounded up a few teachers and a parent to attend a residential, three-week workshop in the summer of 1993.

"I was reluctant. I was busy in the classroom and I didn't think I was ready for this type of thing," said English teacher Ronald Cradle. "But they began to show me I had leadership qualities I was suppressing...I and a colleague started using portfolios that opened my eyes to a whole new way of teaching."



One of the first changes Grover Cleveland's staff made last school year was dividing students into grade-level families to give them a sense of belonging. And over time, the school climate began to improve. One noticeable difference: fewer false fire alarms. Previously, teachers had led children out of the building so many times during the year that sixth-grade teacher Michelle Taylor recalls a student who pleaded with her, "'Please, just let us burn, Miss Taylor.'"

Bagby remembers that last spring's eighth-grade graduation was one of the best ever. "Everyone worked really hard to set it up," he said. "The kids felt really special. I think we did a really good job at making everyone feel better."

That was one of the goals of the Middle Grades Project, which is backed by a $1.5 million grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and other corporate and foundation support. Princeton Center president Sharon Rose Powell developed the Middle Grades Project after studying several middle school reform efforts that had failed, mainly because staff and student attitudes were so bad.

"Over time, we recognized that bringing in these programs — good as they are — in a climate that is such that people don't talk to each other, well, the program doesn't work," Powell said.

The first year of the Middle Grades Project was devoted to improving interpersonal relationships and preparing teachers for structural reforms. Principals were required to serve on the teams to help foster school-wide changes.

"People will look at curriculum, they look at structure," Powell said. "But what

they don't look at is what changes need to occur in order for restructuring to take place."

Drawing on ideas from the Carnegie Foundation's important middle school study, "Turning Points," and their own training, Powell and her staff began by trying to boost communication among team members. During last summer's workshops, teams learned to start faculty meetings with straight talk or ice-breakers that could generate meaningful conversations about school problems. They also designed school events that would get more students and parents involved.

When the Middle Grades Project began, the Princeton Center hired an outside group to complete a baseline assessment for each of the participating schools. The survey will be repeated at the end of this year to gauge progress. Among other things, the baseline study indicated that very few students at the project schools felt engaged in their studies.

Last school year, master teacher educators visited the schools monthly and helped the leadership teams follow their own agendas for improvement. Corporate sponsors from the community also joined the teams.

But there have been plenty of obstacles to reform. The worst for Grover Cleveland's team was a year-long job action, called by the New Jersey Education Association. Working without a contract, teachers in the Elizabeth school district were told not to attend faculty meetings or take on any responsibilities after school hours. The Grover Cleveland leadership team continued to meet in a conference room supplied by corporate partner Sea-Land Service, Inc., but team members could not recruit others to join them.

Other leadership teams in the Middle Grades Project encountered strong opposition from fellow teachers, packed schedules that pushed meeting times to the pre-dawn hours, and painful uncertainties about how to proceed. Nevertheless, all the teams returned to the Princeton Center last summer to prepare for the second year of reform.

As one teacher observed, "I never want to go through another year like this, but we have to."

Leadership team members at Rahway Intermediate School, a school for grades seven and eight in suburban Rahway, New Jersey, fretted that they had lost their way and described their vision statement as "just a piece of paper" with little meaning. But as master teacher educator Barbara Wittenberg led them through a careful review of the year, team members remembered some accomplishments including rewriting the student handbook and improving communication at faculty meetings. Wittenberg used the team's complaints to develop a plan for more outreach to other teachers this school year.

The second summer workshop marked a transition from generally uncontroversial, feel-good strategies for improving school climate to more difficult plans for achieving curriculum reforms. In addition to trying to involve more faculty members in the reform initiatives, each school in the Middle Grades Project will work with the Princeton Center to train an instructional leadership team responsible for implementing interdisciplinary teaching, cooperative learning and new assessments.

***"People will look at curriculum, they look at structure, but what they don't look at is what changes need to occur in order for restructuring to take place."***

But during the summer workshop, the second-year goals seemed daunting. For example, while the Grover Cleveland staff members were giving up part of their summer vacation to learn how to improve their school, the district superintendent was fired, causing them to wonder what kind of support they'll receive in the future.

Despite the uncertainty, Grover Cleveland's leaders are marching on. Dixon said she wants to delegate more responsibility for running the school to her faculty and staff. And Ronald Cradle, who didn't want to bothered with the project a year ago, has decided to take on the job of liaison between the leadership and instructional teams.

"Before, I kept to myself," Cradle said. "Now, I'm a whole new man."

*Maisie McAdoo is an education writer based in Brooklyn, N.Y.* ■

*Team members from Lord Stirling School in New Brunswick, New Jersey, sing and dance during a break.*

# Meeting a HIGHER Standard

## Teachers Try Out National Certification

*By Gail H. Mancini*

Across the country, 539 middle grades teachers are waiting to hear whether the vacations they gave up last December were in vain. Whether they are as good in the classroom as they thought. Whether the 100-plus hours they devoted to meeting tough new national teaching standards will pay off.

These self-described teacher guinea pigs volunteered for the field test of National Board Certification, which is being conducted by the National Board For Professional Teaching Standards, a nonprofit group based in Detroit. The project grew out of the 1986 Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, which recommended changing the way teachers are trained and evaluated. The standards project aims to raise the performance bar for America's teachers whose only current hurdles are state licensing requirements that set minimal competencies.

Certificates for Early Adolescence English/Language Arts and Early Adolescence Generalist are the first of about 30 that should be ready by the year 2000. The Early Adolescence certificates are for teachers who deal with students ages 11-15.

*Mary Buss*
*Grand Junction,*
*Colorado*

Teachers who participated in the pilot phase saw the certification process as a chance to improve their instruction and raise their professional status.

"There has always been a part of me that can't help but assess what bombed, what worked," said Janice Gabay, who teaches ninth-, 11th- and 12th-graders at Junipero Serra High School in San Diego. "This affirms what I'm doing is valid, that it matters."

Jerry H. Dunmire, who teaches at Attucks Middle School in Hollywood, Fla., said he jumped in because he wanted to help clear up the public's confusion about what makes a good teacher.

"People can identify a good teacher just by asking students," Dunmire said. "But measuring those skills has always been the big mystery. It's an art *and* a science. This is the first well-organized attempt I've seen."

There was another advantage for teachers who participated in the field tests — they didn't have to pay the $975 cost of certification.

Officials with the standards project see other benefits. They hope the certificates will help improve teaching nationwide. They believe that as states and local school boards adopt incentives for teachers to achieve certification — which is happening in scattered areas of the country — excellence in teaching will finally be rewarded with something other than an offer to leave the classroom for a more lucrative job.

The $50 million standards project includes about $19 million in federal funds, the rest from private foundations.

Many teachers who were invited to try for certificates in the pilot phase have already received recognition for distinguished work in the classroom. About 1,300 teachers started the field test, but nearly two-thirds dropped out, mostly for lack of time, said Joanne Kogan, communications manager with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. About 18 percent of the teachers who completed the certification process were from minority groups, she said.

James R. Smith, senior vice president for assessment and development at the National Board, said the first group of teachers was so talented that he wouldn't be surprised if all gained certification the first time out.

But many of the teachers don't share Smith's confidence — they're worried about flunking. Teachers wonder if they'll get constructive criticism, or just a rejection. They wonder if they'll be allowed to retake the parts they flubbed. (Not at this point, Smith said.) And they wonder if they can trust the anonymous panel of trained teachers who will score the assessments.

"One thing the National Board cannot measure is my relationship with my students," said Mary Buss, who teaches at Bookcliff Middle School in Grand Junction, Colo. "But that's the strength of my teaching. That's something I can't capture on videotape."

The certification process ran about three months last year. Teachers described the requirements as rigorous; the extra work caused tension among family members and regular midnight sessions at the computer. But the teachers also praised the process for helping them analyze their teaching skills in creative ways.

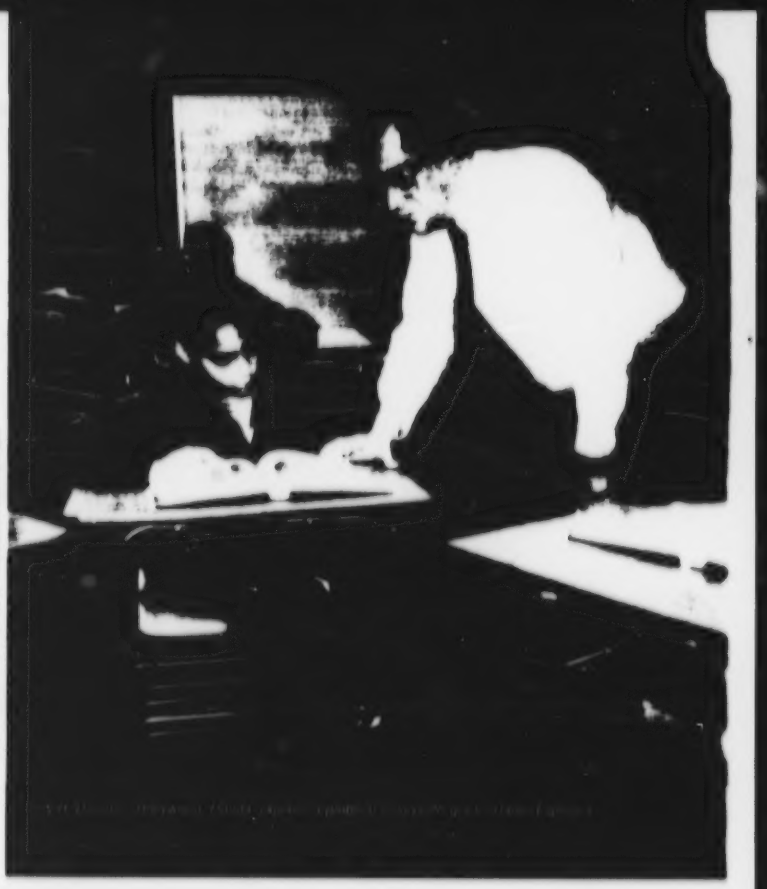
"I wanted it to be a stretch that helped me discover my own strengths and weaknesses, to allow me to think about my work," Buss said.

Although the tasks varied slightly by subject, most of the teachers had to prepare a narrative description of their work with a class during a three-week period including detailed experiences with three students. They had to submit videotapes of themselves teaching and some samples of student work. They also had to prepare a written analysis of the videotape and answer questions about it in an oral exam.

In addition, teachers had to review volumes of material to prepare for a two-day test at an assessment center. Much of the test consisted of writing essays on different topics.

"We had to comment on two or three poems," said Vincent DeLucia, who teaches at Crossroads Middle School in South Brunswick, New Jersey. "It was more like an undergraduate exercise than an educational one."

Teachers who applied for the



PHOTOS PICTURED BY MARY BUSS (LEFT) AND JERRY TURNER (RIGHT)

English/Language Arts certificate won't get their results until June; candidates for the Generalist certificate should have received word in October while High Strides was going to press. Kogan said the scoring system developed for the English certificate was too complex, expensive and unreliable, so officials sent it back for revisions.

Part of the challenge is that test-makers don't have a track record of providing consistent, defensible, bias-free results on items such as videotapes and portfolios, said James Raths, chairman of educational studies at the University of Delaware, who has been following the process.

Despite concerns about scoring, the standards board plans to stay on schedule with the next round of certificates. Teachers can take the English/Language Arts and Generalist exams this year; if the scoring problems can't be solved, Smith said, teachers will get their money back. In addition, five new certificates will undergo field tests this year: Early Childhood Generalist; Early Adolescence Social Studies and History; Adolescence and Young Adulthood Math; Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood Art; and Middle Childhood Generalist.

Some people have raised concerns that the process will favor teachers from wealthy, suburban school districts with strong staff development programs and the latest technology. Ross M. Burkhardt, who teaches at Shoreham-Wading River Middle School in Shoreham, New York, said he was initially wary of the project. But Burkhardt, who is president-elect of National Middle School Association, said he's been pleased with the way the standards board has tackled the fairness issue.

Smith acknowledged that teachers who work in districts with lean budgets for staff development and a low regard for instructional strategies such as team teaching will have a harder time becoming certified.

"We walk a delicate balance here," he said. "You don't want to get too far ahead of the profession. But you (also) don't want to codify the status quo and reward it." ■

*Gail H. Mancha is a South Bend, Ind., writer specializing in education issues.*

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## Letters To The Editor

**"CONTINUE TO HELP KEEP US HONEST"**

I am heartened by *High Strides'* September / October issue on the state of middle school reform—not because of the results reported (there were numerous accounts of unsuccessful, incomplete, unsupported, or thwarted reform projects and schools), but because of the courage and candor of *High Strides* and the National Middle School Association in acknowledging the reality of these failures and disappointments.

Real progress and change have been made more difficult, I believe by a preoccupation in the educational media with "uplift"—often just simplistic, uncritically examined public relations—masking the fact that meaningful and lasting change requires enormously hard work, long-term commitment, persistence through ups and downs, and extensive support. We do need to know what's working and get to see models of achievement, but we also need to know what's not working and examine why—and these often include projects that started well or worked for a while.

Please continue to help keep us honest.

*—Gill Schmerler*
*Director, Center for Minority Achievement*
*Bank Street College of Education*
*New York, New York*

**"CONGRATULATIONS"**

Congratulations on the Sept. / Oct. 1994 issue on reform. The emphasis the articles place on patience and fortitude, the necessity for total buy-in, and the infrequency of real systemic change are right on target.

From our perspective as an organization of retired corporate executives, there is an interesting and relevant analogy to the corporate experience.

As you point out, we must keep emphasizing the successes and encouraging persistence.

Keep up the good work.

*—Gerald D. Levy*
*President, Education Group*
*National Executive Service Corps*
*New York, New York*

**"MISSING THE MARK"**

"Spare the rod, spoil the child" is still true. Public education is missing the mark (by not punishing bad behavior that disrupts classroom instructions) when we fail to correct forcefully.

I'm retired and giving time to a public school. What are your comments on this subject?

*—Fred T. Nolan*
*Jackson, Mississippi*

**RESURRECTION** Continued from page 7

feels " like a professional, like an intellectual now. When I first started out teaching, I was given my keys to the classroom and that was it. I got visited once a year by the principal. There was no feedback...Now we have such a network of teachers to call. I'm not alone anymore. It makes all the difference in the world."

Experiences such as these have taught Bimes-Michalak some important lessons about staff development:

- Respect teachers as learners. No one can coach as well as classroom teachers, she said, once they've learned how to do it.
- Be demanding. Training shouldn't be regarded for its entertainment value or quick fixes, she said, but rather for its ability to stimulate discourse.
- Provide feedback. After she observes teachers in the classroom, for example, Bimes-Michalak writes a detailed evaluation and meets at length with teachers to point out their strengths and weaknesses.
- Model effective teaching. "We must take the same risks that we're asking teachers to take," she said. ■

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HIGH Strides
THE BIMONTHLY REPORT ON URBAN MIDDLE GRADES Volume 7, No. 3 January / February 1995

# This Does Not Compute!

*By Bill Zlatos*

## Urban Schools Lose Speed in the Technology Race

PS 023629

PHOTO BY JEFFREY P. GROSSCUP

Last spring, students in T-shirts, shorts and hip boots tossed oranges into the Genesee River in western New York. As the current carried the fruit downstream, students used measuring tapes and stopwatches to calculate the speed of the 158-mile-long river. They also plucked crayfish and bugs from the river and studied them.

The experiment was part of a science and technology project, sponsored by the Rochester Institute of Technology, in which five urban, suburban and rural schools located at different points along the river were supposed to share data about the river's speed, temperature and life forms. Using computer networks, participants shared information with each other and discussed water quality with students in Texas, California and Europe. They later wrote about their findings.

But students at Charlotte Middle School in Rochester missed out. Although Charlotte was invited to participate in the project, the school lacked the necessary phone lines and computer modems to gain access to the Internet, the telecommunications super-highway that links computer users around the world.

To Tracy Walker, Charlotte's lead teacher for technology, the incident demonstrates how a lack of technological equipment and resources can mean lost learning opportunities for students.

"It's difficult to get students to write things because what we're asking them to write is often not meaningful," he said. "By asking them to communicate with students in other parts of the country or world, we can give them" that experience.

Like many urban middle schools around the country, Charlotte has discovered a disturbing reality — in the technology race, they have stumbled off the starting blocks.

"There are large discrepancies in the allocation and use of technology between urban and non-urban schools," said Gene Carter, executive director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in Alexandria, Va., and former superintendent of the Norfolk Public Schools.

In some cases, communities have disagreed about how to spend scarce financial resources. Take the Anne Arundel County Public Schools, for example, a district of 71,000 students in Annapolis, Md. In 1993, the school board asked the county council for $1.6 million, part of a long-range technology plan that ultimately was expected to cost about $35 million. Residents who preferred more hardware debated the wisdom of the district's plan to connect all 120 schools to local and national computer networks. Last July, the county appropriated only $500,000 — enough to network nine schools.

TECHNOLOGY Continued on page 4

30

# CONTENTS


**1** **Computer Crash**
Many urban middle schools have stumbled off the starting blocks in the educational technology race. Bill Zlatos discusses the problem, and points to some schools that are gaining on the field.

**3** **Technology and Achievement**
Technology is not a panacea guaranteed to fix the problems of urban schools. Many schools misuse costly equipment and set unrealistic goals for technology programs. Holly Holland explains why some people are concerned that too few schools are tying technology use to student achievement.

**6** **Transforming Technology in Schools**
What do a pick ax, a hard hat and a gold mine have to do with technology? Plenty, reports Margaret Trimer-Hartley. The Transformations Project uses these and other tools to show students exciting applications of math and science in the work place.

**8** **Trash Troops**
Middle school activists refuse to feel intimidated by the size and complexity of global environmental problems. As Susan Herzfeld Glazer explains, they're leading a national campaign to clean up the planet.

**10** **Great Expectations**
In our regular feature on schools that set high expectations for urban students, Peter Blumberg looks at the six-year-old Alaska Paideia Project, which teaches students to think, read, write and debate like ancient Greek philosophers.

**5** **Resources**

**12** **News To Use**


***Next Issue:***
***Math standards — what difference have they made in urban middle schools?***
***Visual Math — Looking at the QUASAR Project.***


**HIGH STRIDES Volume 7, Number 3**

**High Strides** is published five times a year by National Middle School Association, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370, Columbus, OH 43231-1672. Editorial offices are at 4004 Alton Road, Louisville, KY 40207, TEL 502-899-1924, FAX 502-899-1961. **High Strides** is a benefit included in all levels of NMSA membership. Other subscriptions: U.S. $15 yearly rate, $4 per issue; international: $25 yearly rate, $6 per issue. To order call 1-800-528-NMSA.


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## From the Editor

There's a lot of talk these days about technological equity, making sure that advances in the computer industry don't leave poor schools unplugged. But where there's money involved, there's usually a dog fight.

Intensive lobbying by the nation's Bell operating companies and other telecommunications firms killed Senate Bill 1822 before Congress adjourned last October. Along with a companion bill in the House, the Senate measure would have required the Federal Communications Commission to insure that public institutions have access to telecommunications networks through favorable rate structures.

Around the country, there are other efforts to help pay the technology admission fees for schools that can't afford them. Last October, the National Telecommunications & Information Administration awarded $24 million — which generated an additional $43 million in matching funds — to 92 civic and education groups in 44 states that are trying to distribute technology's assets more fairly. The money didn't stretch far enough, however. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown acknowledged that the department received requests for more than $560 million in assistance.

Last year, the California Public Utilities Commission and Republican Gov. Pete Wilson authorized diverting to schools $40 million of the $49 million that Pacific Bell had overcharged consumers for long distance calls. The money was to be used for school staff development and computer network hook-up charges. But ratepayer groups and legislators have challenged the measure, said John Cradler, director of technology policy at Far West Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco.

Other states and the federal government are sizing up the phone company overcharges as a source of funds for technology access, Cradler said. An amendment to Senate Bill 1822 sought to pay for hookup charges by tapping into the estimated $300 million annually that phone companies nationwide overcharge customers for long distance service.

Meanwhile, some people are urging deeper discussions about technology's role in education. They argue that technology access will be meaningless unless schools figure out how to use computer-assisted instruction to boost student achievement.

In the October issue of *Electronic Learning* magazine, editor Therese Mageau wrote about the absence of technology in most discussions of national education standards, a seeming contradiction in a movement that aims to define what skills students will need in the 21st century. According to Mageau, the International Society for Technology in Education has recently joined with seven other groups, including the nation's two largest teachers' unions, to seek funding for a project "to define the role technology can and should play in American education."


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# Forward Thrust

## Aiming the Power of Technology at Student Achievement

*By Holly Holland*

When it comes to using technology in the classroom, people tend toward one of two extreme positions: Schools should buy all the equipment they can afford because computer-assisted learning is the wave of the future; or schools should bar the gates to the infidels because machines can't replace the human touch of teaching.

One group views technology as a panacea, the other sees it as an intruder. Only rarely do people talk about how technology contributes to student achievement.

"Some inner-city schools don't have the right equipment, but it actually scares me more to see schools using what they do have in a retrograde way," said David Thornburg, director of the Thornburg Center for Professional Development in San Carlos, Calif. "They tend to institutionalize the drill-and-practice approach, lower-level learning that perpetuates an underclass."

Many policy-makers and school administrators assume unusually high expectations for technology, believing that machines by themselves will transform low-achieving students into scholars. Without consistent training, however, teachers won't set high standards for computer instruction or learn how to blend it into the curriculum.

Geraldine Carroll, supervisor of instructional technology for the Detroit Public Schools, said she wishes more time and money could be spent helping teachers get comfortable with computers and understand both the opportunities and the limitations of technology.

The Detroit schools have developed several programs to link technology to student achievement, including "IMPACTS: Integrating Middle School Parents and Computers, Teachers and Students," which helps mostly low-income parents understand how to use computers, help with their children's homework and reinforce what the teacher does in the classroom. The school system also publishes *Double Click*, a slick tabloid that includes articles about technology trends, innovative projects in the Detroit schools and information about obtaining grants to buy computer equipment.

Such efforts are helping, Carroll said, but many people seem disappointed that technology hasn't cured all the academic woes of urban schools.

"My frustration has been that people think technology is magic," Carroll said. "They often think that if you spend all this money on equipment you should be able to move students reading at the second-grade level to the 10th-grade reading level" instantly.

Barbara Means, head of the Learning and Technology Program at SRI International, a non-profit research group based in Menlo Park, Calif., said she frequently gets calls from business leaders who want to "bless" schools with donations of computers and other equipment, but don't want to engage in the harder task of helping schools "relate it to their instructional goals."

Since 1991, Means has helped lead a $600,000 project for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement to conduct a national study of technology and education reform.

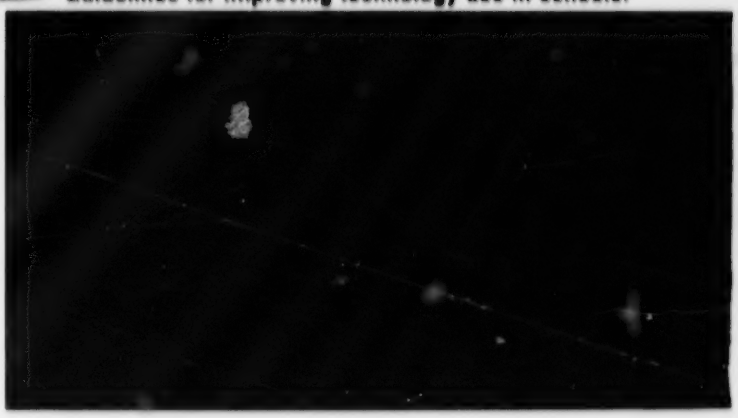
"The majority of today's computer-based instructional programs do little more than put the ubiquitous student workbook on a computer monitor and automate the right/wrong scoring that a teacher would otherwise do by hand," Means writes in *Technology and Education Reform*, one of the recent reports on the project.

In an interview, Means recalled studying an urban middle school in a North Central state that should be on the cutting edge of technology. School district officials helped the school get business sponsors who donated huge technology labs with state-of-the-art equipment. But then district officials hired teachers and administrators who didn't support the school's mission, she said, and the project eventually was dismantled.

Another urban middle school in a Southwestern state took a different approach, Means said. The school district hired a principal a year before opening a middle school that was to specialize in technology. During that time, the principal studied the best ways to use technology in middle grades, then hired staff members who supported her goals. That middle school is flourishing, Means said, with students consistently scoring among the highest in the state on standardized tests despite their poor family backgrounds.

Means said there is ample anecdotal evidence that well-integrated technology programs boost student achievement, but few well-designed research studies have attempted to measure the gains. ■

### Guidelines for improving technology use in schools:



TECHNOLOGY Continued from page 1

"We feel we're playing catch-up" with suburan schools in technology, said associate superintendent Ron Beckett.

Observers said the long-term consequences of the technology gap for urban schools may be severe. Besides missing out on hands-on learning experiences such as the Genesee River project, adolescents who don't gain computer skills also may forfeit future job opportunities. And they may lose access to basic services, such as ordering food and airline tickets, that are expected to become more automated in the future.

"You begin to allow a two-tier system to develop, those who have the technology and those who don't," said Bob Palaich, director of policy studies and information systems for the Education Commission of the States in Denver. "Unfortunately, 10 to 20 years from now, those who have had the experience of using the technology will have an economic advantage."

However, many technology experts, while pointing a finger at urban schools, offer this caveat: Virtually all schools trail the public in technology use.

"Schools are the telecommunications ghetto of American society," said John Yrchik, senior researcher at the National Education Association (NEA) in Washington, D.C. "There is no other single institution that has fewer telephone lines and less access to telecommunications technology than the American public school system — bar none."

For example, a 1993 study conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates for the NEA, found that just 12 percent of teachers nationwide have telephones in the classroom.

In addition, the study found that urban classrooms are less likely to have a television, cable television or a videocassette recorder than those in small cities, towns and rural areas. Although computer access was basically the same among wealthy and poor school districts, 53 percent of the wealthier districts had access to a computer modem — the gateway to telecommunications networks — compared to 30 percent of poor districts.

The main limitation for urban schools is money. Many cities have lost businesses and middle-class families to the suburbs. And with an eroding tax base, urban school districts often can't afford to keep up with advances in computer technology.

The sheer size of urban districts — multiplied by the cost of buying equipment and training teachers — makes the technology race seem daunting. Urban districts also tend to have older school buildings with outdated electrical wiring that is costly to improve. Detroit school officials, for example, estimate that it will cost $750 million just to wire the district's 8,000 classrooms and 286 schools for computer and video use.

At Crockett Middle School in Beaumont, Texas, the wiring is so inadequate that some of the electrical outlets don't work, said principal Clifford Hardeman. Some of the school's windows are rusted shut, some rusted open, making it difficult for air conditioners to properly cool the computers.

Hardeman said he closed the school's computer lab once last year because it was full of termites.

"We had to have a couple of computers repaired because they clogged it up," he said.

Many urban schools use what equipment they do have in limited ways. With a higher concentration of disadvantaged students, urban schools tend to use computers for remedial drill-and-practice exercises, said Cheryl Williams, director of technology for the National School Boards Association in Alexandria, Va. But that approach only serves to keep urban students farther behind. Williams said many suburban schools have moved computers out of labs and into classrooms where students can use them to improve their writing and research skills.

Bonnie Bracey is a member of the National Information Infrastructure Advisory Commission, a group of 32 citizens who make recommendations to the U.S. Department of Commerce about using computer networks. She said

PHOTO BY JEFFREY P. GROSSUP

PHOTO PROVIDED BY LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL

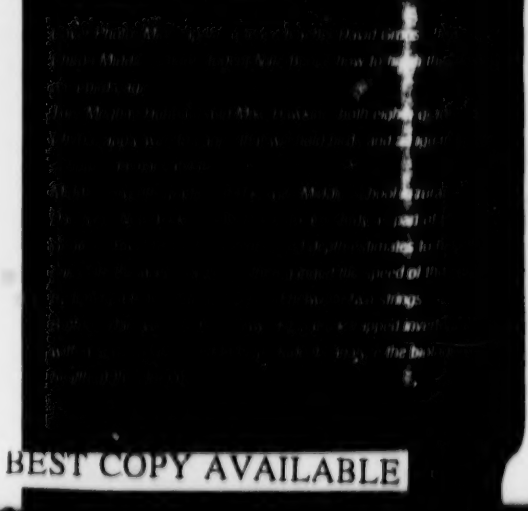


PHOTO PROVIDED BY DARQUILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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she attended seven educational conferences in a recent month. And at each one, she said, an urban superintendent emphasized that the district had a greater immediate need for security, not computer, equipment.

Bracey, who used to teach at an elementary school in a poor section of Washington, D.C., said teachers in crime-plagued neighborhoods worry that technology equipment will be stolen or vandalized. They also fear for their safety, she said, if they stay after school to learn how to use the equipment.

And unlike suburban families who often have computers in their homes, many urban students have no access to computers outside of school. As a result, Bracey said, there's little community pressure on schools to invest in more technology.

Although there are many barriers to using technology well in urban districts, some schools are beating the odds.

Chiron Middle School in Minneapolis, for example, has the advantage of being in a building that's only six years old. Still, the school used $13,000 of a $15,000 budget for capital improvements to upgrade the electrical wiring in classrooms.

Each classroom in the school has a telephone. Teachers use the phones to confer with colleagues and coordinate activities with University of Minnesota graduate students who let Chiron students shadow them on campus once a week.

David Groos, a science and math teacher, turned to technology to strengthen a school-wide project on animals and the environment. Working in teams, students have built six-cubic-feet animal habitats. They plan to build a total of 10 habitats by the end of the school year, providing homes for hamsters, mice, rabbits, zebra finches, a corn snake and an iguana.

The students used electronic mail to consult with teachers about designing a ventilation system for the habitats. They can get on the Internet to talk with zookeepers and veterinarians and ask questions such as: Why won't the iguana eat or climb on the tree branches? Would a bull snake or a corn snake be easier to handle? What shape pan would the snake prefer to use for molting?

"We're making communications that wouldn't have happened before," Groos said. "Now teachers can integrate the computer into the curriculum. Instead of using them like a book, now they're being used like a tool."

In Detroit, at least two classrooms in every school are wired for cable television. School officials use the televisions to boost instruction through distance learning. Twice a week, elementary and middle school students receive televised math and science lessons from specialists in the district. And twice a week, elementary and middle school teachers receive televised math and science lessons from the specialists who help them develop hands-on activities for students.

The Dallas Public Schools offer seventh-graders a comprehensive computer literacy course that includes word processing, spreadsheets and desktop publishing. Using interactive laser discs, teachers can customize lessons to fit students' interests.

All Dallas computer labs have modems and electronic bulletin board connections to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Students can call up commodities listings and grocery advertisements, for example, to study the relationship between the price of cattle and the price of hamburger.

Jeri Hodges, director of instructional applications/technology services for the district, said Dallas schools avoid buying "drill-and-kill software" and, instead, seek computer programs that help students use their imaginations.

"We try not to buy $5 workbooks with $2,000 sets of lights," Hodges said. "It costs way too much to use computers as a workbook. That's not going to help our kids get a job." ■

*Bill Zlatos is a Pittsburgh-based writer who specializes in education issues.*

## Resources

**Transformations Project**, coordinated by the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers, P. O. Box 1205, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. TEL 800-433-2463. FAX 617-983-8887.

**Earth Force**, 1501 Wilson Blvd., 12th Floor, Arlington, VA 22209. TEL 703-243-7400. FAX 703-243-7400.

***Technology and Education Reform: The Reality Behind the Promise***, edited by Barbara Means, Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, San Francisco, TEL 415-433-1767. FAX 800-605-2665. $28.95 plus $4.50 shipping.

"Using Technology to Support Education Reform," published by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. To order send $7 and request document No. 065-000-00604-9 from New Orders, Superintendent of Documents, P. O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954.

"Telecommunications and Education: Surfing and the Art of Change," a guide for using computer networks to further education reform. Includes special section on middle-level grades. The cost is $35 plus $3.75 for shipping from the National School Boards Association Distribution Center, P. O. Box 161, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0161. TEL 800-706-6722.

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, has several reports and publications including "Destination Tomorrow: An Atlas for Technology Use in Education." For more information, contact John Cradler, director of technology policy. TEL 415-565-3000. FAX 415-565-3012.

"Building the Future: K-12 Network Technology Planning Guide." Includes sections on staff training, case studies and resource lists. The $11.75 book is available from the K-12 Network Planning Unit, Educational Technology Office, California Department of Education, P. O. Box 944272, 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, CA 94244-2720. TEL 800-864-7135.

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# Transforming Te

*By Margaret Trimer-Hartley*

Holly Cook knows she's a good teacher. She can steer her seventh-graders through the basics — algebra, photosynthesis and minerals — with ease.

But Cook, who teaches science and math at John Dewey Middle School in Denver, often feels overwhelmed trying to stay on top of new developments in her fields.

"Things change so fast," she said. "There are so many new things coming into just environmental education alone. Something like the endangered species list changes so fast that you can't always be current.

"These days, you really just have to get comfortable with saying to students, 'I don't know yet.'"

With the help of a new nationwide partnership between middle school teachers and specialists in math, science and technology, finding answers may be easier than ever.

The Transformations Project, sponsored by the 80,000-member American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers, links 200 teachers from urban, suburban and rural school districts in 38 states with technology specialists. The goal is to foster long-term relationships in which businesses, utilities and governmental agencies will work closely with educators to develop lessons with exciting, real-world applications of math, science and technology. The project, which drew several thousand applications from teachers, has spent about $1 million so far.

"There is an incredible demand for any kind of scientist or even pseudo-scientist to be in classrooms," said Galen Knutsen, chief of intermountain field operations at the U.S. Bureau of Mines in Denver, who works with Dewey Middle School.

"Teachers are trying hard to keep kids motivated. But science is such an abstract thing that bringing real, live scientists into the classroom has an incredible effect on kids."

Since the school year began, Dewey teachers have met geologists and other scientists Knutsen knows at local museums and the U.S. Department of the Interior. Dewey teachers have begun building a library of videotapes and publications on a range of subjects including recycling and the environment.

Knutsen also helped set up a field trip to the Edgar Experimental Mine in Idaho Springs, Colo., so Dewey students could learn about historical and modern gold mining operations and about the minerals used in skin-care products.

Teachers participating in the Transformations Project nationwide still focus on basic math, science, social studies and language arts skills. And they still live with limitations — too little technology, too little training and too little time. But with the help of their technology partners, teachers now can expose students to new career options, introduce them to developing concepts and help them grapple with some of the social, political and environmental issues brought on by the increasing uses of technology.

The technologists also help middle school students see that the

# chnology in Schools

lessons they learn today will be important tomorrow. That message is particularly important to students who will enter a job market that is expected to have few openings for those without advanced math and science skills.

"We can tell them about future products," said James Rush, product development engineer at Ford Motor Co., who is working with teachers and students at Detroit's Miller Middle School. "I can show them vehicles with T.V. monitors, devices that can prevent you from backing (the car) over your kids. That kind of stuff is exciting to kids. It sparks their interest."

Captivating middle school students is critical. Educators say students are most likely to be turned off by math, science and technology in the middle grades.

"The public tends to see that this is only a need for the high schools, but by then it's too late," said Velma Walker, an assistant superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools and chairwoman of the Council of Great City Schools' technology committee.

The five-year Transformations Project began last summer in Boston with a two-week training session for teachers and their technology partners. Each teaching team — the project requires a minimum of two teachers from each school — had to develop several integrated lesson plans to share with other participants. In addition to forming local partnerships, the project has linked teachers and technology specialists to the Internet through America Online.

As part of the project, each teaching team and each technologist had to receive permission from their employers to get at least five days off this school year to work together and attend additional training sessions.

Although the project is still evolving, the excitement from the early training session has led to some intriguing plans. In Detroit, four teachers at Lessenger Middle School and their partner, an engineer from Detroit Edison, plan to help students build a model home with full electrical installation. The team also plans to take students on field trips to a nuclear energy plant and a plant that converts waste to energy.

Elizabeth Trenkle, a sixth-grade math teacher at Lessenger, said she hopes the partnership will inspire students to work on projects for science and technology competitions.

"Now we have all kinds of new resources to do all kinds of new projects," she said.

In Las Vegas, Trish Cobb is trying to integrate science and technology into her sixth-grade reading program at Kenny C. Guinn Middle School with the help of Dan Lampshire, an engineer with the U.S. Bureau of Mines in Reno, Nevada.

"We could do something like read science fiction and ask a scientist whether what we've just read is really feasible," Cobb said.

The possibilities for the project are great, but so are the obstacles. Pairing two groups of people from different backgrounds doesn't automatically equal success, said Joanne Van Voorhis, spokeswoman for the Transformations Project.

"We've laid the foundation," she said. "We've introduced teacher to technologists and to each other. But we're seeing people from two very different cultures meeting with not a lot of rules set up. Anything can happen."

For example, teachers have had to ask the technologists to simplify their language so students and teachers can understand them. Despite support from administrators, teachers still do most of the work for the project on their own time. And standardized testing and other school district demands can get in the way of project plans.

But project participants are still optimistic.

Rush, the Ford executive, started working with the Detroit public schools several years ago when he noticed that his two children weren't getting sufficient math and science instruction. Professionals like him, he said, have to stop complaining about education and start helping.

"As talented as they are, teachers can't do it alone," he said. "They need to be kept up to date, and the only way to do that is to put them in touch with the people in the field." ■

*Margaret Trimer-Hartley covers education for the Detroit Free Press.*



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# Trash Troops

## Student Environmentalists Send This Message:

# "Stop Abusing Our Planet"

*By Susan Herzfeld Glazer*

Damian Anderson belongs to the Natural Guard. Maria Braid enlisted as an Earth Warrior. William Wong signed up with the Service Group.

The group names may sound military, but their battle is for peace. And though the soldiers are mostly middle school students, they've shown adult-sized heroism in their campaign to end the war against the environment.

Anderson, Braid and Wong share a common cause as advisory board members of Earth Force Alliance, an Arlington, Va.-based group of national youth environmental organizations that was launched last February. The three teenagers recently supervised the alliance's "Preserve Wildlife" project with 16 other students, 8 to 15 years old, who serve on the board.

Preserving wildlife was the top choice last spring among the 145,000 ballots cast by students nationwide in a campaign to identify the most critical environmental issues for young people. From October through December, Earth Force distributed more than 50,000 free classroom guides that explained the problems confronting wildlife and suggested actions such as cleaning up habitats, planting butterfly gardens and writing to government officials.

"These kids are learning many things from this," said Nadine Reis, campaign manager for Earth Force. "They are thinking globally and becoming environmentally aware. And their self-esteem is growing as they are looked on as leaders in their communities."

Although Earth Force is a national program, the students who serve on the advisory board received their basic training at home.

Damian Anderson, 16, has been a member of the Natural Guard, an environmental group based in New Haven, Conn., for five years. The project began as an after-school activity at Jackie Robinson Junior High School in New Haven, "to get kids off the street, and have something to do that is educational and environmentally safe," said Damian, now a sophomore at Platt Regional Vocational-Technical School in Milford, Conn.

The Natural Guard maintains a garden in a local park. It supplies fruit and vegetables to churches and soup kitchens that feed the poor. Last year, the group sponsored a Hunger Banquet to illustrate the world hunger problem. Participants were divided into three groups: One group sat on the floor and ate rice; another sat on chairs and ate rice, gravy and water; and the third group sat at tables and enjoyed a full-course meal.

Damian has traveled extensively to talk about environmental problems. Last year he attended a White House conference on the environment with Vice President Al Gore.

Maria Braid is another teenage activist who is

outspoken in her concerns about the environment. The 13-year-old eighth-grader from Buffalo wrote to the mayor, city council members, state legislators and all the members of Congress about the "Preserve Wildlife" campaign.

A Native American, Maria said it is a custom of her people to reflect on how their actions will affect their great-grandchildren who will inhabit the earth in seven generations.

"Man is taking everything from the earth and not replacing it," she said. "We should also stop buying products that can't be recycled and start buying products that can."

Maria is active in Earth Warriors, an environmental group sponsored by her middle school, Native American Magnet No. 19. She plants trees at school, feeds birds and squirrels and recycles plastics and newspapers. Former Buffalo Mayor James Z. Griffin wrote Maria to praise her for her efforts.

Maria believes that Buffalo residents are becoming more environmentally conscious, thanks in part to a city-wide recycling program.

"On garbage day, you see a whole line of blue bins down my street," she said.

William Wong, 13, an eighth-grader from San Francisco, became environmentally active after frequently gagging and coughing on exhaust fumes belching from city buses. After receiving no response to his letter to the bus company, William joined The Service Group, a school-sponsored club that participates in beach and park clean-ups. He also runs the aluminum and newspaper recycling program at his school, Star of the Sea Elementary School. Proceeds fund school supplies and equipment.

In Lauderhill, Fla., Lara Weisblatt, 12, learned about recycling from her parents, but she carried her activism to school.

Now a sixth-grader at Nova Middle School, Lara said one of her favorite projects was working with other fifth-graders at Banyan Elementary School last year to raise nearly $700 for rain forest conservation. The students raised the money by making and selling products, such as rain forest paper pads and stationery, in a school specialty store. Two of the store's most popular items were "Tree-Top Pops" and "Rain Deer," made from lollipops and candy canes decorated to look like trees and reindeer.

Lara said she also helped organize a carpool project by encouraging families to ride together to her elementary school. She credits her third grade resource teacher, Charlotte Pine, for sparking her interest in the environment by explaining global issues to students, touching on air pollution, deforestation and the shortage of landfills. Lara said she and her classmates responded by collecting aluminum cans for recycling, cleaning up a beach on Sanibel Island and picking up litter at school.

"I'm proud that I have the privilege of helping," Lara said. "I'm lucky to have had a teacher like Mrs. Pine, who made me aware of the problems and how to solve them."

Antonio Gonzalez, 11, of Vadito, New Mexico, raised $900 for "Pennies for the Planet," a fundraising project of the Children's Earth Fund. He and his father visited schools and distributed information and collection jars. A month later, they sent the money raised to the organization's rain forest planting project.

Antonio, a sixth grader at Peñasco Elementary School, has been environmentally aware — especially about animals — since he was six years old.

"We live in a real small place with lots of wildlife and nature," he said. "I want to keep this place as beautiful as it is now." ■

*Susan Herzfeld Glazer is a New Orleans-based writer and the mother of a middle school student.*

*Antonio Gonzalez*
*Peñasco Elementary School*
*Vadito, New Mexico*

*Lara Weisblatt*
*Nova Middle School*
*Lauderhill, Fla.*

*William Wong*
*Star of the Sea Elementary School*
*San Francisco, Calif.*

*Maria Braid*
*Native American Magnet No. 19*
*Buffalo, New York*

*Damian Anderson*
*Platt Regional Vocational-Technical School*
*Milford, Conn.*

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY EARTH FORCE

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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

*By Peter Blumberg*

# Socrates Lives Through Alaska Paideia Project

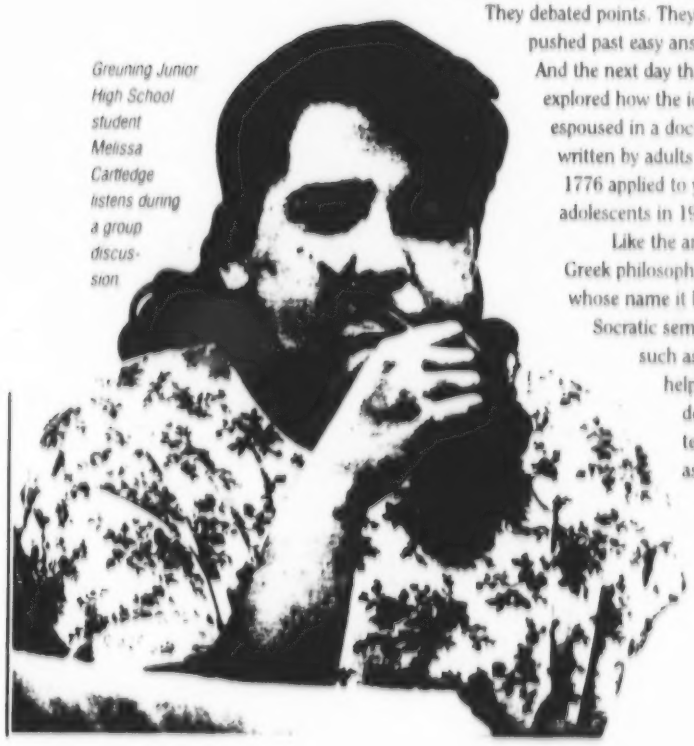
ANCHORAGE, Alaska — The seventh- and eighth-graders in Steve Ex's social studies class at Greuning Junior High School came to terms with the Declaration of Independence, word by word.

What did Thomas Jefferson mean by the phrase, "We hold these truths to be self-evident?" What are "unalienable rights?" What is "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?"

The students posed the questions, then helped each other find the answers with some prodding and hints from Ex, who acted as a moderator.

"What is equality?" he asked them. "When is revolution appropriate? Do we really need government?"

The students, sitting in desks arranged in a circle, spoke without raising their hands. They debated points. They pushed past easy answers. And the next day they explored how the ideas espoused in a document written by adults in 1776 applied to young adolescents in 1994.



*Greuning Junior High School student Melissa Cartledge listens during a group discussion*

PHOTO BY DIANA STEINBAUER

Like the ancient Greek philosopher whose name it bears, a Socratic seminar such as Ex's helps students test assumptions and develop new ideas by asking probing questions. It's a method of inquiry that is becoming increasingly popular in middle grades around the country, including several junior high schools in Anchorage.

Known locally as the Alaska Paideia Project — Paideia in Greek means fulfillment of the highest potential — the Socratic seminars started here in 1986 at Steller Alternative School, for grades 7 through 12. Since then more than 100 Anchorage teachers and dozens of parent volunteers have been trained through Paideia workshops. The project runs on an annual budget of about $100,000 in public and private funds.

"At the core of this is trying to build the best kind of community for kids, to respect their opinions, to get them to listen to each other," said Ken Ziegahn, director of the Alaska Paideia Project. "You get them to value community. That's a wonderful power that schools don't tap into."

Ziegahn said teachers are encouraged to use Socratic techniques two hours daily for an entire semester. The seminars can be used with any subject, he said. At Steller, for example, all seventh- and eighth-graders must spend at least one semester in a Socratic seminar. Some students study geometry by reading Euclid in the original. Some study biology by reading and discussing Darwin's "Origin of the Species," in addition to completing laboratory assignments they design themselves. Students take 90-minute oral exams at the conclusion of each Socratic seminar.

Teachers believe that the success of the Paideia Project is measured in good conversations.

"We're trying to encourage a higher-level of dialogue," said Dave Eckert, a Paideia instructor. "The students are already pregnant with ideas. The teacher comes in not as an authority to impart factual information, but as a fellow learner."

Ziegahn said the district hasn't completed any formal research on how the Paideia Project has affected student achievement. But he points to last year's



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standardized test scores at Central Junior High, whose students come from some of the school district's poorest families. At Central, he said, the 100 eighth-graders who took Paideia classes scored on average significantly higher than the norm for students at their grade level on the Watson-Glazer Critical-Thinking Test.

Students have mixed opinions about the Paideia approach. Gabe Swiderski, a junior at Steller who took his first seminar in junior high, said "student participation is a big part of it. If they don't read the assignments or they don't talk in class, it's not going to work. It depends on the teacher, too, how well she can facilitate discussion...It's kind of easy to slide by and not do anything."

Zak Schulhoff, a senior at Steller, believes he would have learned more in a traditional biology class than through a Socratic seminar.

"It was good as far as the philosophy goes, but not so good for science and math," he said.

But Steller senior Indi Rey said he often hears students in traditional classes complain that math is confusing and irrelevant. He said his seminar geometry class, on the other hand, consistently linked math concepts to real-life applications.

And Rebecca Kyle, a Steller junior who has taken several Socratic seminars beginning in the seventh grade, said they helped her focus her thoughts and find answers to difficult questions. Kyle said the seminars sparked her curiosity so much that she visited bookstores to find out more about "the fourth dimension" and the inter-relationship between biology and physics.

Teachers acknowledge that some students adapt to the Socratic seminar approach better than others. Students who don't raise their hands much in traditional classroom settings often become more talkative when they discover that their comments will not be judged as right or wrong.

"Even students who have been labeled with special needs will flourish in incredible ways given the chance to share their ideas," Eckert said. "Honors students are sometimes frustrated because there is no one answer — they have always learned to figure out there is one answer and have been rewarded for it."

Ex, whose students sampled literature ranging from Franz Kafka, Plato and Kurt Vonnegut during the Socratic course, said he saw a new side of his students. The class structure promoted cooperation, he said, instead of competition.

"The opportunity is not always there for kids in a traditional class to explore their own thoughts," Ex said. "When the kids get on a roll, there will be nothing for us (teachers) to say for a lengthy period of time." ■

*Peter Blumberg is a staff writer at the Anchorage Daily News.*

## Lessons Learned

- Resist the urge to always be the expert. The success of a Socratic seminar depends not on what you know, but on how well you can keep the conversation flowing. "You don't have to jump in every time it gets quiet," Ex said. "A student might fill in the gap."
- Don't assume that students know how to read critically. Very few students will read challenging books outside of class, Ziegahn said, so teachers have to help them analyze texts in a group setting.
- Put yourself in a student's shoes. To prepare for his role as a Paideia facilitator, for example, Ex attended a college seminar where he knew the material would be over his head. "Exploring readings with a group of other people allowed me to learn from everyone present," he said.
- Don't expect miracles. "We are shooting for high things," Ziegahn said. "It's difficult at first. The goals are fundamental changes, not quick fixes."

***The Paideia program is based on the work of educator and philosopher Mortimer Adler, who formed the Paideia Group in 1979. His books include* The Paideia Proposal, Problems and Possibilities *and* The Paideia Program.**

***Socratic seminars aim to help students construct their own knowledge through analysis and evidence, giving "students a chance to think out loud and have their opinions respected...at an age when adults don't usually respect their voices," said Dennis Gray, a consultant with San Diego Socratic Seminars, who has trained about 1,000 teachers in that district.***

***The Chattanooga Public Schools recently received a $40,000 grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to assess the impact of the inquiry-based instruction on students' thinking and problem-solving skills. Instead of just using Socratic seminars in isolated classrooms, teachers and administrators in Chattanooga are trying to use the techniques to analyze the goals of education reform, said Patricia Weiss, president of The Paideia Group Inc. in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, who is assisting the Chattanooga schools.***

***For more information contact:***

***The Paideia Group Inc., P. O. Box 3423, Chapel Hill, NC 27515. TEL 919-929-0800. FAX 919-932-3905. The National Paideia Conference will be held in Chicago March 3-5.***

***San Diego Socratic Seminars, Muirlands Middle School, 1056 Nautilus St., La Jolla, CA 92037. TEL 619-459-2324 or 800-354-3544. FAX 619-459-2325.***

***National Paideia Center, Campus Box 9045, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC. 27599. Distributes information, conducts research and trains educators in the Paideia approach. TEL 919-962-7379. FAX 919-962-7381.***

***Alaska Paideia Project, Ken Ziegahn, director. TEL 907-279-2541.***

***Diana Dankowski, middle school coordinator, Chattanooga Public Schools. 615-825-7279.***

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# news to use

**Teams of teachers representing** 15 urban middle schools have received $500 grants from the Southern Regional Council and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to study, reflect and plan ways to boost student achievement. The competitive grants went for team projects including developing an effective assessment for Socratic seminars, studying multiple intelligences and using technology to promote high curriculum content.

The winning schools: Crosby, Iroquois, Johnson, Lassiter, Thomas Jefferson and Southern middle schools, Louisville, KY; Phoenix II, Tyner, Hixson, Lookout Valley middle schools and Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts, Chattanooga, TN; West Baltimore Middle School, Baltimore MD; Stanford Middle School, Long Beach, CA; Parkman Middle School, Milwaukee, WI; and Mann Middle School, San Diego, CA.

**Two dozen specialists** in urban school reform have formed an advisory board to begin shaping a five-year plan designed to help educators who primarily work with poor and minority students. The board, which was convened by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in Alexandria, Va., aims to find ways to boost student performance in large urban school systems, promote the exchange of research-based teaching practices and broaden the scope of service to urban educators.

Problems that engulf many urban schools — such as street violence, drug abuse and declining resources — "make it all but impossible for many of them to live up to their promise," said Gene R. Carter, the Association's executive director and former superintendent of the Norfolk Public Schools in Virginia. "It will take cooperative efforts among educators, community agencies and organizations of all kinds to make a lasting difference in many classrooms."

(For more information, contact the Association for Curriculum and Development, 1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1453. TEL 703-549-9110.)

**Middle school reformers have a new way to help** students meet high standards by the end of eighth grade, writes Phyllis McClure, former director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, in a recent report prepared for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. In the report, "A New Tool for Middle School Reform: Title I — Improving America's Schools Act of 1994," McClure said changes in the law regulating Title I funds, which were approved by Congress in October, require schools to align Title I spending with state and district reforms. The changes also mean more flexibility for schools, she said, including using Title I funds for professional development.

**The Center for Early Adolescence at the** University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill plans to sponsor the Institute For Middle Grades Reform beginning next summer to promote student achievement in urban school districts. During the planned two-year program, participating school districts will move toward middle grades reform by conducting an audit to assess current middle grades practices, analyzing effective middle grades practices, developing a district vision, setting academic standards, and monitoring progress.

For more information, contact Holly Hatch, Director of Middle Grades Education, at the Center for Early Adolescence, Suite D-2, Carr Mill Town Center, Carrboro, NC 27510. TEL 919-966-1148, FAX 919-966-7657. E-mail hatch@email.unc.edu.

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HIGH Strides
THE BIMONTHLY REPORT ON URBAN MIDDLE GRADES Volume 7 No. 4 March / April 1995

# Setting Standards for Excellence:

# Math Goals Help Teachers Aim Higher

*By Linda Jacobson*

Six years ago, when the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) became the first professional organization in the country to release content standards for schools, Chris Lawrence was still a senior in college.

Lawrence thought NCTM's call for more complex problem-solving and real-life applications of math sounded good, but he wasn't sure how to translate the theory into practice.

"I always knew there was something more, but I didn't know where to look," said Lawrence, now a sixth-grade math teacher at Atlanta's Snapfinger Academy of Math and Science, a public school for grades K-7.

Lawrence found some answers through the Atlanta Math Project, a four-year-old program that has helped about 300 teachers understand how to use math standards in the classroom. In addition to presenting overviews of the standards, project coordinators videotape participating teachers each month and let them observe and discuss lessons with other math instructors.

STANDARDS Continued on page 4

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# CONTENTS


**1** **Math Standards**
What difference have they made in urban middle schools? Linda Jacobson searches the country and finds some promising practices. But supporters of the standards movement acknowledge that they must do more to help teachers translate theory into practice.

**3** **Research**
A new report, "Effective Schools in Mathematics," finds that top-performing schools typically have high expectations, advanced courses and positive school climates.

**6** **A + B = Quality Algebra**
Recognizing the importance algebra plays in preparing students for college, some urban educators are rethinking their approaches to teaching middle school math. Priscilla Pardini discovers that many urban middle school students are capable of excelling in algebra — when adults give them the chance.

**8** **Increasing Eye-Cues**
If seeing is believing, then students at six schools that have tried out the QUASAR project's hands-on, problem-solving strategies should feel at home in Missouri. Bill Graves explores classrooms where students and teachers embrace the "show-me state" approach.

**10** **Great Expectations**
In our regular feature on schools that set high expectations for urban students, Daniel de Vise goes to court where he finds that students at Lindbergh Middle School in Long Beach, Calif., have developed their own version of juvenile justice.

**3** **Resources**

**12** **Letters to the Editor**


***Next Issue:***

**Charter schools** — What can we learn from the national effort to give public schools greater independence?

**Teachers as scholars** — Urban middle school teachers earn paid sabbaticals to expand their professional knowledge.


[redacted] STRIDES, Volume 7, Number 4

High Strides is published five times a year by [redacted] School Association, 2900 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 175, Columbus, OH 43231-7672. Editorial offices are at 4004 Allison Road, Louisville, KY 40207, TEL [redacted]. High Strides is a [redacted] publication. Subscriptions: U.S.: $15 yearly rate, $4 per [redacted] yearly rate, $6 per [redacted]. Educator call 1-800-528-NMSA.

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[redacted] Publication Manager


## From the Editor

This issue of *High Strides* hit me on a personal level. As the stories in this issue point out, students typically turn on or off to math in middle school. In my case, the lights flicked off.

I won't bore you with all the details for, I suspect, many of you have your own stories to tell about middle school math mishaps. Suffice it to say that while I enjoyed math in elementary school, I lost sight of its relevance in junior high and felt woefully unprepared for algebra in the ninth grade. I gave up after geometry.

Jill Ker Conway, former president of Smith College, seems to be speaking about my own experience in this passage from her book, *The Road from Coorain*, which describes her junior high curriculum at a private school in Sydney, Australia:

"In mathematics, we studied arithmetic and simple geometry, five times a week. The textbooks were English, and the problems to be solved assumed another natural environment. It was possible to do them all as a form of drill without realizing that the mathematical imagination helped one explore and analyze the continuities and discontinuities of the order which lay within and beneath natural phenomena. We learned to treat language as magical, but not numbers and their relationships."

Some of us missed our chance with math. But I'm hopeful that the current generation of middle-schoolers will benefit from the increasing attention being paid to hands-on, inquiry-based math instruction and efforts to start the preparation for algebra and geometry in elementary school.

How can we get more teachers and students to meet the challenge of rigorous, meaningful math? Kathe Rasch provides some excellent suggestions in her recent paper, "The Imperative for Quality Middle School Mathematics Curriculum and Instruction," published last spring in NMSA's Midpoints. Among her tips for teachers:

- Look for high-interest situations to use mathematics in daily life — the quality of life in the pond next to school; the mathematics of AIDS; the logistics of the Civil War; the mathematics of building the railroad.
- Begin to assess differently, right away. Consider the use of journals to have students write about what they are learning.
- Explore computer software and simulations that are open-ended and challenging. Buy and learn to use a TI-Explorer or similar calculator.
- Be patient about your own mathematical ability, and recognize that your understanding of it will be changing simultaneously.

Here's to better experiences with middle school math. Count on it.




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# High Expectations = Better Math Students

A positive school climate, advanced courses, high expectations and testing related to instruction are common factors in schools with effective math teaching, a new report suggests.

According to "Effective Schools in Mathematics: Perspectives from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1992 Assessment," those factors produce better math students even when adjusting for the socioeconomic characteristics that put some students at a disadvantage.

"The number of advanced mathematics courses taken was the most powerful predictor of students' mathematics performance after adjusting for variations in home background," said the report, which was released last October.

"Students in the top-performing schools have a greater opportunity to learn by virtue of being in school more often and with less mobility. In the top-performing schools there was less absenteeism, class cutting, tardiness and transiency."

Unfortunately, very few top-performing students attended schools in disadvantaged urban communities or came from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

By the time they reach middle school, lower-performing students — most of them poor, minority adolescents in urban schools — find the path to rigorous math preparation effectively blocked. They are tracked into general math courses that repeat basic arithmetic lessons from elementary school.

The report found that students in the top-performing schools were more than twice as likely as those in the bottom-performing schools to be enrolled in algebra by the eighth grade.

"Because of the sequential nature of the mathematics curriculum and the practice of tracking, course-taking has an enormous impact on students' opportunity to learn," the report said. "Those students who never take more challenging coursework are unlikely to learn advanced mathematical concepts in out-of-school settings.

"Beyond that, however, research indicates that instruction is qualitatively different in high- and low-track classes. Students in low-track classes have less exposure to more challenging goals such as inquiry and problem-solving skills and less access to the teaching strategies that are most likely to generate interest and promote learning."

The report detected some promising trends. In eighth grade, for example, 28 percent of all students tested in 1992 reported taking pre-algebra compared with 20 percent who took the NAEP test in 1990. In addition, students enrolled in general math classes declined overall from 61 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 1992.

Nationally, about 26,000 fourth-, eighth- and 12th-graders in 1,500 public and private schools participated in the national assessment of mathematics.

Copies of "Effective Schools in Mathematics" are available for $7 each from the National Center for Educational Statistics' education-information branch at the U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20208-5641. TEL: 1-800-424-1616. Order # 065-000-00706-1. ■

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## Resources

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1906 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1593. TEL: 703-620-9840.

Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning (QUASAR), Learning Research & Development Center, University of Pittsburgh, 706 LRDC, 3939 O'Hara St., Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Margaret S. Smith, project coordinator. TEL: 412-624-7791.

Equity 2000 is run by The College Board, 45 Columbus Ave., New York, NY 10023-6992. Vinetta Jones, national director, Jean Llewellyn, national dissemination coordinator. TEL: 212-713-8268.

The Algebra Project, 99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA 02139. Linda Grisham, executive director. TEL: 617-491-0200.

The Math Learning Center, Portland State University, P.O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97207. Eugene A. Maier, president. TEL: 503-725-4850.

Regina Chaney, Student Court director, Lindbergh Middle School, 1022 E. Market St., Long Beach, CA 90805. TEL: 310-422-2845.

"The Imperative for Quality Middle School Mathematics Curriculum and Instruction," by Kathe Rasch, Spring 1994 issue of Midpoints, Vol. 4, No. 2. The paper is available for $3 per copy. TEL: 800-526-NMSA. Order #M042.

Project PRISM (Partners For Reform in Science and Mathematics) is a national, community-based program run by the National Urban League Inc. The project offers free materials about current issues in math and science. Project PRISM also operates a national educational data base on math and science reforms, available through computer modem at 1-800-836-6734. For more information, call 1-800-TO-PRISM.

*Real-Life Math Mysteries: A Kid's Answer to the Question, "What Will We Ever Use This For?"* by Mary Ford Washington. Includes 104 pages of math activities based on NCTM standards. $19.95. Prufrock Press, TEL: 1-800-998-2208.

The Connected Math Project, Michigan State University, 101 Wills House, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. TEL: 517-432-2870. Willam Fitzgerald, co-project director.

Maths In Context, National Center for Research in Mathematical Sciences Education, Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1025 W. Johnson St., Madison, WI 53706. Thomas Romberg, director. TEL: 608-263-3605.

PHOTOS BY TERRY A. RENNA

*Cover photo: Seventh-graders Jose Estrada and Ronda Reagh assemble blocks to simulate a math drawing at Cutler Ridge Middle School in Miami, Fla.*

*Top: Cutler Ridge math teacher Lorraine Valladares explains a problem about depth perception to seventh-grader Tony Real.*

*Bottom: Left to right, Cutler Ridge seventh-graders Tricia Daly and Danica Dailey graph different views of stacked blocks.*

*Right: Cutler Ridge seventh-grader Alicia Kenny uses a geometric figure to help explain perception.*

**STANDARDS** Continued from page 1

Lawrence regularly consults with his teaching partner, a seventh-grade math teacher at Snapfinger.

The training has been invaluable, Lawrence said, prompting him to constantly seek new ways to make math meaningful to his students instead of just assigning pages from a textbook. Last fall, for example, Lawrence took his students on an imaginary shopping trip for a Labor Day picnic. He wanted to show them why they needed to learn multiplication and division. For the assignment, Lawrence's students had to plan a meal for 27 people with a budget of $60. And they could choose only menu items listed in the grocery's newspaper advertisement.

"Some actually had $32 left over," Lawrence said, bragging. "Those kids could shop."

Helping teachers such as Lawrence aim higher with their math instruction was one of NCTM's goals. The groundwork for the standards actually began in 1983 when the report, "A Nation At Risk," warned that American students lagged behind their international peers, particularly in math and science.

As of last summer, educators had ordered more than 200,000 copies of the standards. The original document, Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics, was followed by Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics. And this spring, NCTM will release the final piece, Assessment Standards for Teaching Mathematics, which stresses that testing methods must be updated along with curriculum and teaching methods.

But six years into the project, many of those who helped draft the standards now recognize that their work has just begun.

"Teachers need a lot more help in making the changes. None of us realized how much," said Jack Price, president of the 120,000-member NCTM, based in Reston, Va.

To better understand the application of standards, for example, Price has spent one day a week over the last two years working and observing at Spurgeon Intermediate School in Santa Ana, Calif. The school is participating in the QUASAR Project, a University of Pittsburgh program that aims to raise math achievement among urban middle school students.

Price said he has noticed that students are becoming less reluctant to tackle challenging assignments. Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies now, he said, but still need more motivation to keep from falling back into old habits.

NCTM officials said it's too early to expect widespread improvements. But they are encouraged by signs that their emphasis on more rigorous math instruction is paying off. For example, eighth-grade math scores on the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress increased over the 1990 results in all six areas tested.

NCTM's math standards cover kindergarten through high school. At the middle school level, the standards seek to decrease rote memorization of formulas and fill-in-the-blank tests in favor of open-ended problems and classroom discussions about math. The standards aim to teach middle school students how to look for patterns, make estimates and recognize geometric shapes instead of memorizing geometric terms.

NCTM does not approve or disapprove of various math programs that profess to meet the standards. Officials stress that the standards represent a vision of excellence, not a mandate. The guidelines are open to interpretation, they said, and implementation will vary from classroom to classroom.

Many teachers can't point to an increase in local test scores because of the math standards. But some have reported noticeable improvements in their students' ability to understand math concepts, explain



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verbally and in writing how they solved math problems and make connections between math and other subjects.

"We don't have hard evidence, but what we see is that students are willing to stretch," said Ruth Ann Duncan, a sixth-grade math teacher at National City Middle School in San Diego County, Calif. "I know there are students that, with a traditional curriculum, would have long been lost. They would have been sitting there waiting to drop out when they turned 16."

Duncan said National City Middle was a "drill school, a worksheet school up until a few years ago" when it became one of 20 locations in 12 states involved in the Connected Math Project. Connected Math, which is funded by the National Science Foundation and coordinated by Michigan State University, is one of several pilot programs designed to help teachers draw lessons from the math standards. Connected Math includes thematic units, such as "About Us," which teaches students to use data, and "Accentuate the Negative," which focuses on positive and negative numbers.

At Reizenstein Middle School in Pittsburgh, which is involved in the project, Bill Schafer's sixth-grade math students spent weeks surveying their classmates to find the characteristics of an average sixth-grader. Using indicators such as favorite music, clothing and hobbies, students displayed the data in a series of graphs, an example of the NCTM standard that says students should "explore problems and describe results using graphical, numerical, physical, algebraic and verbal mathematical models or representations."

Maths in Context, another project stemming from the NCTM standards, also draws praise from educators who have tried it. Maths in Context asks middle school students to approach math from a variety of angles including using manipulatives such as cubes, geoboards and protractors to help them move from concrete to more abstract problem-solving.

"This is a dream," said Hector Hirigoyen, district mathematics supervisor for the Dade County Public Schools in Florida, where four middle schools are officially using Maths in Context, and other teachers have been borrowing the lessons.

"The children that take it up with more fervor are the ones who were not good with math before."

But Hirigoyen and others acknowledge that the standards won't have a lasting impact on instruction unless teachers learn and use new strategies, which often require more preparation than traditional methods.

Steve Sprague, a sixth-grade math teacher at Jefferson Middle School in Madison, Wis., found that he and his colleagues had to work through the Maths in Context problems before they could teach them to their students.

"What it forces teachers to do is to think a lot harder," he said, adding that when teachers try new approaches, they often go through a period of feeling "insecure in front of kids."

In addition to performance anxiety, teachers have been uneasy about the way the new strategies will play out on standardized tests.

Karen Schultz, a research professor at Georgia State University and co-director of the Atlanta Math Project, said early evaluations show that scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are "significantly higher" at many of the schools where teachers are using math standards. But at one of the strongest schools in the program, she said, the math scores declined.

"Quantitative measures are only one piece of the puzzle," Schultz said. "It's hard to communicate to the public how kids are learning differently."

In Memphis, Tenn., middle school teachers who volunteered to participate in the Maths in Context program have been caught between their desire to expose their students to richer math assignments and the need to do well on Tennessee's state tests, which are tied to a more traditional curriculum.

"Everybody agrees that this is the way to go, but not everyone has come to grips with all the issues involved in change," said Susan Militello, who coordinates the Maths in Context program for public and private schools in Memphis.

Although Price said he believes the standards have "stood the test of time," NCTM officials will review them in 1996 to see if they need to make revisions. The standards cover so much territory, he said, that it's difficult for teachers to know what skills to focus on.

In the meantime, however, teachers like Chris Lawrence are pleased to have found so many more ways to communicate math to middle school students. Lawrence said he often begins his classes by asking students to "tell me everything you know about" equivalent fractions, perpendicular lines, or whatever the day's topic might be.

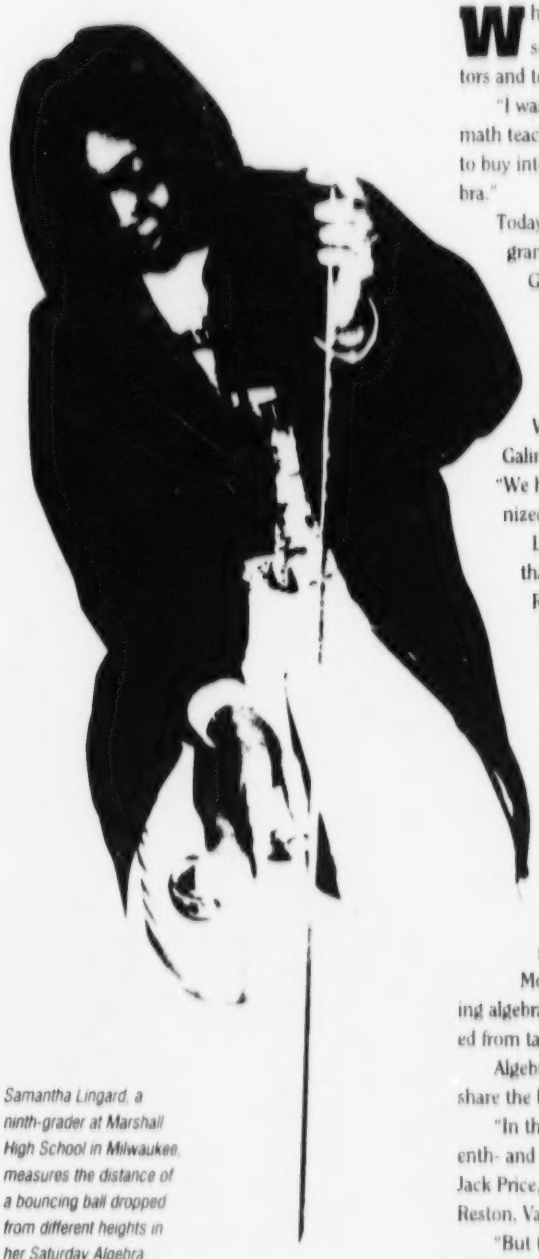
The students' answers aren't always on target, he said, but they usually discover that they know more than they thought.

"At this age," he said, "you can either turn them on or them off" to math. ■

*Linda Jacobson is a former education writer at the* Atlanta Journal and Constitution *and now assistant director of the Education Writers Association in Washington, DC.*

# "If I Can Do Math, I Ca

## Urban Schools Open I



*Samantha Lingard, a ninth-grader at Marshall High School in Milwaukee, measures the distance of a bouncing ball dropped from different heights in her Saturday Algebra Experiments class.*

When his principal told him three years ago to stop drilling his middle school students on the multiplication tables and, instead, pass out calculators and teach them algebra, Alberto Galindo was skeptical.

"I was a nay-sayer, and found it hard to let go of the old ways," said Galindo, a math teacher at Burnett Academy, a public middle school in San Jose, Calif. "I used to buy into that elitist crap that only kids with IQs of 132 or above could learn algebra."

Today, thanks to training he received as part of Equity 2000, a national program that aims to give minority students more rigorous math instruction, Galindo has changed his mind about what middle school students can do.

At Burnett, where the student population is 80 percent minority, remedial math courses have been eliminated in all grades and teachers have been retrained to challenge students with more advanced problem-solving strategies. The goal: to prepare more students for college.

Where once he struggled to get students to complete their assignments, Galindo now finds that 98 percent of his algebra students do their homework. "We have a lot of sharp kids," he said. "But their talents had gone unrecognized. If you raise the expectations, the children will rise to meet them."

Like Galindo, math teachers around the country are starting to believe that all students can — and should — learn algebra.

Research has shown that it is more effective to challenge average and below-average students with advanced work than to give them another dose of the same basic math curriculum year after year.

According to the New York-based College Board, whose Equity 2000 program is one of several around the country that aim to help more minority students make a successful transition to college, algebra is the course that determines who goes on to higher education. Studies done for the College Board indicate that students who master algebra are two to three-and-a-half times more likely to enroll in college than those who do not. And while most minority students attend college at lower rates than white students, minority students who pass algebra and geometry succeed in college at almost the same rate as their white peers.

Most colleges require three years of high school math for admission, including algebra and geometry. And without taking algebra, students are usually excluded from taking other college-preparatory courses such as physics and chemistry.

Algebra has been difficult for many students — and educators say they must share the blame.

"In the past, we have pretty much lulled young people to sleep in sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade math by mostly reviewing what they've already had," said Jack Price, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, based in Reston, Va.

"But then they get into algebra class where everything is brand new every day and, suddenly, many of them can't handle it."

Experts say it's not enough to push traditional Algebra I classes down to middle school grades. Young adolescents need meaningful, engaging math instruction that helps them understand complex problem-solving, but which also takes into account their developmental needs.

But many students — including a disproportionate number of poor and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# n Do Anything"

## loors to Algebra

*By Priscilla Pardini*

minority students — never get the chance to take algebra or prepare for it. Instead, experts say, educators counsel them into general, applied or business math courses, typically dead-end classes that cover little more than basic arithmetic.

"With all the best of intentions, teachers have tried to protect the kids they saw as not having the capacity," said Anne Wheelock, an education policy fellow at Boston's Northeastern University, and author of "Crossing the Tracks," a book about schools that provide heterogeneously grouped students with challenging curriculum.

"It was subtle racism in the sense that it's the way some believe intelligence plays out by race."

Nijah Thomas, a senior at Milwaukee's High School of the Arts, nearly became one of those algebra statistics. Two years ago he was placed in an applied mathematics course, which focused on basic arithmetic and fractions. Nijah, who is black, said he had been a poor math student in middle school and never questioned the placement.

"I figured if they were going to put me in applied math, that's where I should be," he said.

But Nijah's math teacher, Dave Reber, had just attended an Equity 2000 workshop, and decided to teach the class algebra instead of applied math. Most of the students did as well or better than those in Reber's other algebra classes — 75 percent passed the course. About half of those who passed went on to geometry, Reber said. And a few, including Nijah, enrolled in Advanced Math I, an advanced algebra and trigonometry course that no one once dreamed they could handle.

"In a way I kind of feel privileged that I got a chance to learn" algebra, Nijah said. "I used to think I couldn't do math, that I had a deficiency in math. But when I began to do well in Mr. Reber's class, it opened up a new door for me.

"I thought, if I can do math, I can do anything."

Recognizing that the lack of higher-level courses had previously closed the door to college for many students like Nijah, officials in a growing number of urban school districts have begun requiring students to take algebra before they graduate from high school.

In the Milwaukee Public Schools, just 54 percent of ninth-graders pass algebra, about the same as before the district began requiring the course in 1993. But because only 36 percent of all students took algebra before it was required, many more students are now passing the course, said Mary Henry, coordinator of Milwaukee's Equity 2000 program.

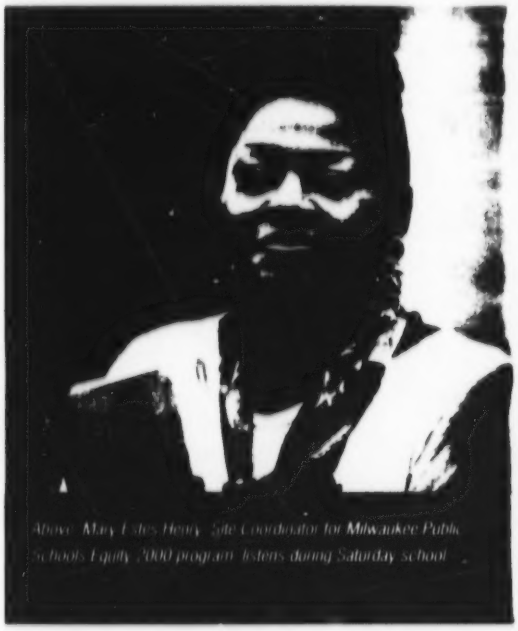
"We know every kid isn't going into college right out of high school," she said. "Some will go to work, some to training schools. But virtually every student needs some kind of post-secondary education. And we want to make sure they are prepared."

Part of the equation involves helping teachers, particularly those in the middle grades, shift their curricula and their expectations into a higher gear. Equity 2000, for example, which started in 1991, offers staff development and curriculum guidance in six cities — Milwaukee; Ft. Worth, Texas; Nashville, Tenn.; Prince George's County, Md.; Providence, Rhode Island; and San Jose. Equity 2000's primary support comes from foundation grants.

Other efforts include The Algebra Project, a 10-year-old program based in Cambridge, Mass., that helps communities undergo systemic education reform with math as its focus. The Algebra Project lends support and provides training to 120 schools around the country, but the local communities are responsible for raising money to support the reforms.

Universal access to algebra also is endorsed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which calls for introducing algebraic concepts as early as kindergarten.

While the goal of getting all students to pass algebra is a worthy one, achieving it can be difficult. Students who are thrown into a traditional Algebra I class without preparation have a good chance of failing, experts said.



PHOTOS BY JOHN L. DIXTON

*Above: Mary Estes Henry, Site Coordinator for Milwaukee Public Schools Equity 2000 program, listens during Saturday school*

Instead, schools must start "bringing them up through a program in which they are constantly exposed to algebraic thinking and concepts," Price said, "and changing the way Algebra I is taught, with more emphasis on reasoning and problem-solving than on manipulating symbols."

For teachers that means revising outdated lesson plans and abandoning rigid attitudes. Earl Watkins, math coordinator for the Jackson (Miss.) Public Schools, said teachers have to start relinquishing some control and let students take ownership of their learning.

Middle school is a good place to start, he said.

**ALGEBRA** Continued on page 12

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# QUASAR

*By Bill Graves*

## Project Uses Visual Aids, Other Strategies to Tap I

PORTLAND, Ore. — Davina Eubanks stepped up to the overhead projector and proceeded to solve the math problem that had stumped the other seventh-graders in her class at Portsmouth Middle School.

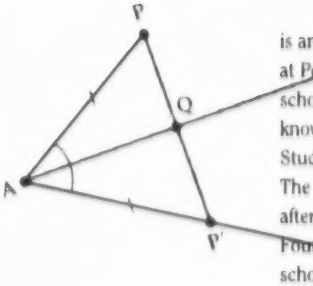
She had no formula to follow as she tried to figure out the number of square units in an isosceles triangle. Instead, she solved the problem with the aid of a geoboard, a pegboard pattern of dots drawn on paper. The smallest square formed by the dots represents a square unit.

Davina drew a triangle between dots on the geoboard. Then she added two triangle mirror images extending from the original triangle's two longest sides, creating a square.

"She's doing it wrong," said student Connie Jones.

"No, you can do it that way, too," said another student, Lisa Hand.

Indeed, she did. By adding two triangles, Davina made a square that enabled her to count the square units within it. And because she knew that the original triangle was equal to half the area of the large square, she quickly produced a solution: three square units. Easy as pi.




Learning math through the use of visual aids is among several promising strategies being tested at Portsmouth and five other urban middle schools across the country through a project known as Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning (QUASAR). The $10 million project, which ends this spring after five years, is sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Its aim is to show that urban middle school students can grasp higher levels of math when they get quality instruction.

The project turns traditional math instruction on its head. Instead of making students memorize formulas, QUASAR teachers look for more hands-on methods to explain math. For example, visual math gives them the problem first, usually in a concrete way. After solving problems visually, the theory goes, students can begin to understand more abstract mathematical principles.

In a traditional math class a teacher might show students that the way to average five numbers — say 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 — is to add them up and divide by five. But in visual math, students learn to view these numbers as stacks of blocks that must be made to have equal lengths. This way they can see immediately that 13 is the average without adding the numbers, said Eugene A. Maier, president of the Math Learning Center, a nonprofit organization at Portland State University that developed the visual math curriculum used by Portsmouth.

"That is the model of averaging they carry with them," he said. "It works in college calculus class when you want to find the average of a function."

Most students in Paul D. Griffith's seventh-grade math class at Portsmouth said they have an easier time understanding visual math.

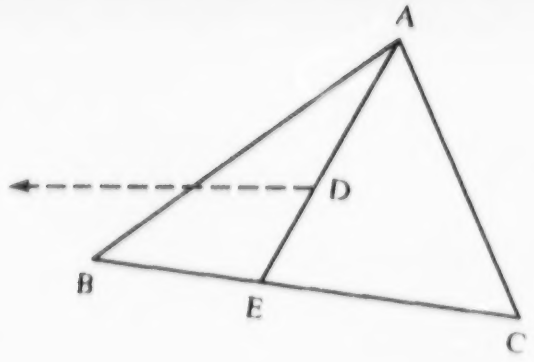
"It makes you think," said Jessica Bowers. "And once you start thinking, you can get the answer."

Some students, however, complained that visual math was too easy. Connie Jones, for example, discovered that figuring the area of a triangle on the geoboard was a cinch. But she was stumped when Griffith asked the class to figure the area of more complicated shapes that resembled lightning bolts and stars.

"Mr. Griffith, this is hard," she complained.

Teachers said visual math has dramatically improved math instruction at Portsmouth, which has among the highest proportion of disadvantaged students in the state. Classes no longer are tracked in the 575-student school, and more youngsters are advancing to algebra. During the 1994-95 school year, for example, 41 percent of Portsmouth's graduates qualified for algebra in the ninth grade, up from 8 percent in 1991.

Portsmouth uses visual math schoolwide, with classes offered every other day in two-period blocks so teachers can cover the material in more depth. The results have been so promising that Portsmouth teachers don't want to return to tra-




## Potential of Urban Students

Top: Seventh graders from Holyoke Magnet Middle School for the Arts Jessica Smith and Katrina Maurer measure and graph plant growth. Bottom: Walter Valentin and Luz Vega use integers and fractions in the real world.

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ditional methods, even though they said visual math is harder to teach.

For example, teachers have to be ready to respond when students offer multiple approaches to solving problems and, in some cases, find more than one correct answer. Assessing student progress also becomes more complicated because students must write about the strategies they use to solve problems and keep their work in portfolios.

Portsmouth has seen the most dramatic gains among the six QUASAR schools, which include Thurgood Marshall Middle School, Atlanta; Holyoke Magnet Middle School for the Arts, Holyoke, Mass.; Thomas Edison Middle School, Milwaukee; Mayer Sulzburger Middle School, Philadelphia; and Spurgeon Intermediate School in Santa Ana, Calif. But all the schools have succeeded in making math accessible to more students by emphasizing problem-solving and understanding rather than computation, said Edward A. Silver, project director and professor of mathematics at the University of Pittsburgh.

Tests developed specifically for the QUASAR project indicate that students increased their ability to reason, solve problems and communicate about math in the first three years, Silver said. QUASAR researchers also compared the performance of the project's eighth graders on the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress with those of their peers around the country. QUASAR students performed much better than a sample of disadvantaged urban students. They performed below the national average on some portions of the test, but as well or better on problem solving, statistics, probability, algebra and functions. These gains have occurred to varying degrees at all six sites, Silver said.

Holyoke Magnet Middle School has had mixed results with its 300 students, said Lynn M. Benander, resource partner for the project. Professors at Mount Holyoke College helped the middle school teachers develop a curriculum focusing on hands-on, project-oriented problems.

The students, nearly 80 percent of whom are Hispanic, typically enter Holyoke performing at the fourth-grade level, Benander said. The QUASAR Project has helped many of them improve their ability to think, recognize patterns and write about mathematics, she said. But "we need to do more," she said.

Achievement gains have been slow because teachers have had to increase their own knowledge of math and change their instructional strategies, said Madelaine Marquez, site facilitator for the project and vice chair of the Massachusetts Board of Education.

Still, none of the six schools expects to discontinue using their new strategies after the QUASAR grant runs out this year, Silver said.

"What drives teachers to do this is the reaction they get from kids," he said. "They have a classroom of kids who are eager to learn. That is pretty energizing." ■

*Bill Graves covers education for* The Oregonian *in Portland.*

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

*By Daniel de Vise*

## Court is in Session: Lindbergh Middle School Students Strike a Gavel for Justice

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Regina Chaney never liked the idea of sending errant students to the principal's office.

It was a routine that seldom satisfied teachers or administrators at Lindbergh Middle School, and it rarely caused students to change their behaviors. Mostly it created stacks of paperwork and piles of resentment.

"A lot of the referrals were for things like tardies and detention," she said. "And the administrators weren't being freed up to handle things like fights, vandalism, weapons on campus."

So, two years ago, Chaney decided to take justice into her own hands. And then she just as quickly passed the power on to her students.

Using concepts that she was already teaching in her English and history classes, Chaney created Student Court, a model of the American juvenile justice system in which students become jurists and settle real adolescent disputes.

"You can't make a child do anything. Middle school administrators need to realize that," Chaney said. "What Student Court does is it puts the responsibility of learning discipline back on the student."

Chaney conducts Student Court training during several class sessions each year, including lessons in basic courtroom procedures, legal terminology and sentencing. She doesn't limit Student Court participation to honors students. Jurists can come from any grade in the school, whose diverse student population consists primarily of Hispanic, African-American and Asian students.

"It's that average kid that you want to target," she said. "It's the kid sitting at the back of the class."

Chaney conducts Student Court on an occasional basis throughout the school year. Cases usually come from teachers who have filed complaints with the principal. Student grievances are handled by a separate panel of students and teachers who comprise the Conflict Management Team.

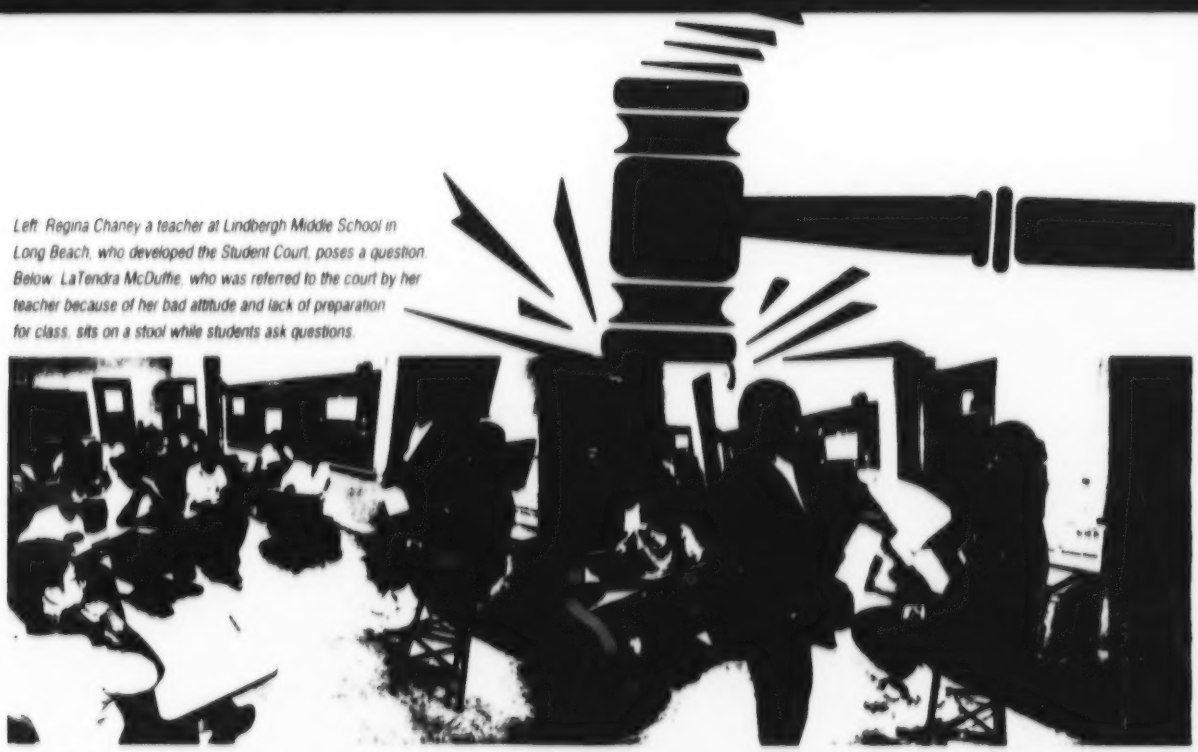
Chaney's Student Court team handles six types of complaints: attendance problems; disruptive classroom behavior; defiance of authority; malicious mischief, including graffiti and other minor property damage; sexual harassment; and obscene or vulgar acts. Student Court won't resolve fights, weapons or drug charges, or other violent confrontations. Those cases go straight to school administrators or, in some instances, to the Long Beach Police Department.

With the exception of suspension and expulsion, Student Court jurists may choose nearly any punishment permitted in the school's discipline code including detention, Saturday school and a team conference, which brings together the student's teachers, parents and an administrator to discuss the child's record.

A Student Court officer is assigned to monitor every case. Students who don't complete their sentences must appear before the court again and receive a more severe punishment. Only four students have ever defied the court's ruling, Chaney said.

Initial results of the program seem promising. Of the 215 cases that went before Student Court in the 1993-94 school year, only five involved repeat offenders. No student broke the same rule twice.

In addition, Chaney



*Left: Regina Chaney a teacher at Lindbergh Middle School in Long Beach, who developed the Student Court, poses a question. Below: LaTendra McDuffie, who was referred to the court by her teacher because of her bad attitude and lack of preparation for class, sits on a stool while students ask questions.*

believes Student Court has helped her students focus more on their studies. Her eighth-grade students have consistently scored among the highest in the school on achievement tests, which she attributes to the intensive writing assignments required of Student Court participants.

Chaney has developed a manual for Student Court and copyrighted it for use by other teachers. Four other Lindbergh teachers are studying the manual and hope to use it with their classes. Teachers from other Long Beach schools have observed Student Court sessions.

Adelmo Martinez, Lindbergh's principal, said Student Court has helped improve student conduct schoolwide and freed up school administrators to concentrate on academic issues.

"I've been an educator for 21 years, and I've not seen such a positive school climate anywhere," he said.

When a Student Court session begins, Chaney dispatches student bailiffs with summonses to fetch the alleged offenders from class.

One case involved Chris Coleman and Norma Castillo, sixth-graders who were accused of disrupting class with their constant bickering. A student court officer escorted Norma to the court room. A second officer brought in Chris, who walked in an exaggerated circle around Norma and pushed his stool away from hers before sitting down.

"Why do you guys bicker with each other?" one student jurist asked. "There has to be a reason."

Chris offered hesitant testimony: "Most of the time she sits up there and talks to all her friends and says, 'Chris is a little punk, and he's got chicken legs,'" he said. "Later on, I say something back."

Norma shook her head as Chris spoke but added nothing.

After hearing all the testimony, the jurists went to work, discussing the case in groups. The verdict: one work detention each — 45 minutes of clean-up detail after school.

During another session, student bailiffs brought seventh-grader LaTendra McDuffie to Student Court. The charge: failing to bring appropriate materials to class and mouthing off to her teacher.

The court commissioner read the charges, and then the questioning began.

"Why are you so defiant when the teacher asks you to do something," one jurist asked.

"Because I'm not going to stand in the corner if I didn't do anything," LaTendra answered.

"Do you think it would help if you could talk to her and tell her it's not fair," the jurist asked.

"Yeah," LaTendra acknowledged.

"How come you don't turn in your homework?" another jurist asked.

LaTendra said her mother works a lot, and often isn't available to help her with homework. And when she asks for guidance in class, LaTendra said her teacher typically responds: 'I don't have time right now.'"

During their deliberations, the Student Court officers discussed ways to improve communications between LaTendra, her mother and her teacher. They decided to schedule a team conference.

A bailiff brought LaTendra back to the court room to hear the verdict. She grimaced, but otherwise accepted her fate calmly.

Before LaTendra left, a Student Court officer went to a supply closet and got some new folders, pencils and pens for LaTendra to use in class. Other officers opened their own school binders and, one by one, handed her sheets of blank paper.

Justice served. ■

*Daniel de Vise is an education reporter at the* Long Beach Press-Telegram.

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## Letters To The Editor

**EMOTIONS STIRRED**

Your article, "Resurrection: Louisville Teachers Reborn as Lifelong Students," in the November/December, 1994 issue stirred some strong emotions at our last meeting. Our faculty includes the former principal and several teachers from Iroquois Middle School in Louisville, KY. Your article refers to Iroquois, Southern and Western Middle Schools as "once considered havens for teachers and administrators who were either inexperienced, demoralized or out of favor with the central office." Imagine our colleagues' humiliation and our embarrassment for them when they were referred to in this manner.

This was one small negative sentence in such a positive piece, but this is the statement that we remember. As educators, we stress the importance of building the self-worth in individuals. However, in this one sentence, you managed to humiliate fine administrators and educators (past and present from the aforementioned schools) to make the present look good.

...We feel that this one statement was very disappointing. We feel an apology should be forthcoming to all the past and present administrators and teachers at the three mentioned middle schools.

Patricia M. Gausepohl
Teacher
Jefferson County Traditional Middle School
Louisville, KY
(The letter was signed by 39 other staff members at the school)

**PUBLIC/PRIVATE COLLABORATION**

I would like to see articles on public/private school collaborations. My sense sometimes is that the middle school movement is largely a public school phenomena.

John Finch
The Allen Stevenson School
New York, NY

**ALGEBRA** Continued from page 7

Algebraic concepts, in particular, mesh well with the strengths and interests of young adolescents.

"They're in an exploratory phase — exploring their own values and the difference between the concrete and the abstract, and exerting their own opinions," said Watkins, whose school district is participating in The Algebra Project. "So you want to emphasize investigation and problem-solving.

"...We're teaching children how to construct math, how to come to a conclusion themselves instead of just memorizing rules."

At Burnett Academy in San Jose, 80 percent of eighth-graders now leave with a full credit of algebra. The others take the course in ninth grade.

It was tough going the first year after the school eliminated remedial math courses, Galindo said, because students and teachers had been accustomed to accepting low standards. But the culture has started to shift, he said, with more and more people believing that math can be both challenging and fun.

"It gives more meaning to my life to know I'm truly making a difference for kids," Galindo said. "Math is the gate, and algebra is the key." ■

*Priscilla Pardini is a Milwaukee-based education writer. She wrote about Milwaukee's experience with the Clark Foundation's Program for Student Achievement in the September/October 1994 issue of* High Strides.

National Middle School Association
2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370
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HIGH Strides

THE BIMONTHLY REPORT ON URBAN MIDDLE GRADES Volume 7, No. 5 May / June 1995

# CHARTING ITS OWN FUTURE

## Oakland's Jingletown Middle School Joins Charter Crusade

*By David Livingstone Fore*

OAKLAND — From the outside, Jingletown Charter Middle School doesn't look like a nationally significant experiment in education. Squeezed into a lot between a Catholic church and a noisy freeway ramp, Jingletown is housed in five double-wide portable classrooms, each of which has thin panel walls and windows that are too small and close to the ceiling to use. The unpaved areas around the buildings turn to mud or dust depending on the weather.

And yet, says principal Clementina Duron, who is one of the school's founders, "We are very fortunate to be here."

The local Catholic diocese leases the school property to Jingletown for a dollar a year.

"I guess you could say our school was a gift from heaven," said Duron, who previously taught at the University of California-Berkeley and served as a junior high and elementary school principal.

Jingletown's backers have not depended solely on their spiritual connections for help. Like many of the estimated 140 other charter schools across the country, Jingletown has survived because of support from the community it serves. Since it opened in the 1993-94 school year, Jingletown and its eight teachers and 120 students in seventh and eighth grades have become part of one of the country's most intriguing and controversial education movements — the creation of charter schools.

Though Jingletown Middle School is surrounded by shuttered factories, crumbling warehouses and an interstate highway, it also is connected to a safe, close-knit neighborhood of mostly Latino immigrants. Few parents wanted to send their children to a large middle school in another neighborhood. They feared that their children would be exposed to drugs and gangs and fall behind in school.

The Oakland Public Schools offered little help. So, when Jingletown residents heard that the California legislature had approved the creation of 100 charter schools, they went to work. A coalition of parents, educators and community organizers persuaded several levels of government, the teachers' union, parents and students to support the effort to throw out California's 7,000-page education code and start from scratch.

**JINGLETOWN** Continued on page 4

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# CONTENTS


**1** **Charter Tour**
Oakland parents wanted their children to attend middle school closer to home, so they joined a national movement to create "charter" public schools. David Livingstone Fore finds that a lack of resources and an uncertain future haven't dimmed the enthusiasm of these charter school crusaders.

**6** **A Private Affair**
When the Minneapolis-based privatization firm, Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), offered to run nine Baltimore schools for less than the district was spending, many people in the community applauded. But three years into the project, skepticism has replaced optimism. Karin Chenoweth studies the scene at the only middle school involved, Harlem Park Community School.

**8** **Teacher Scholarship**
During a typical, hectic day at an urban middle school, teachers may find themselves yearning for the slower pace and reflective opportunities at college. Priscilla Pardini examines a national program that gives teachers a chance to do both — stay close to their classrooms while enjoying a sabbatical at a university.

**10** **Great Expectations**
In our regular feature on schools that set high expectations for urban middle school students, Aida Rogers takes note of a musical program that has students excelling while singing the blues.

**3** **High Strides Index / Resources**

**12** **News To Use**


***Next Issue:***
***Middle school makeovers — states, school districts reconstitute troubled middle schools and start over.***


**HIGH STRIDES Volume 7, Number 6**

**High Strides** is published five times a year by National Middle School Association, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370, Columbus, OH 43231-1672. Editorial offices are at 4004 Alton Road, Louisville, KY 40207, TEL 502-899-1924, FAX 502-899-1961. **High Strides** is a benefit included in all levels of NMSA membership. Other subscriptions: U.S. $15 yearly rate, $4 per issue; International: $25 yearly rate, $6 per issue. To order call 1-800-528-NMSA.


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**Holly Holland**, Editor
**April Tibbles**, Production Manager
**Katie Sullivan**, Designer


## From the Editor

We've read a lot lately about the national push to give public school families more educational choices. The movement includes public schools operated by private vendors; public schools whose separate "charters" free them from traditional bureaucratic constraints; and public school students who use vouchers to attend both private schools and public schools outside their districts.

While most of the coverage has focused on the political and policy wrangling over school choice, we wanted to find out what the newfangled schools looked like up close. This issue of *High Strides* peers into the classrooms of two new ventures, an Oakland charter school and a Baltimore school operated by privatization giant Educational Alternatives, Inc.

What did we find? That the schools seem to be struggling with some of the same issues that beset traditional public schools, including accountability, a lack of money, treatment of special-education students and teacher training; that student achievement gains have been moderate or non-existent; that some people like the new designs and some don't.

Evaluations of the school choice movement nationwide have been mixed. Research sponsored by Harvard University found that while parents report generally high levels of satisfaction with school choice, student achievement has not improved noticeably. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction found that Milwaukee students attending private schools under a pioneering voucher program have done no better than students at the city's public schools. And a study of Massachusetts' inter-district program found that convenience was not the driving force behind choice decisions, as has been expected. Instead, parents (nearly all of them white, suburban residents) have chosen schools based on their high socioeconomic status and academic achievement.

Deborah Meier, the award-winning founder and director of Central Park East School in New York City, argues in a special edition of the urban education journal, *Rethinking Schools*, that conservative forces have taken parents' desire to have a greater say in their children's education and twisted it to suit separatist aims.

"When many conservatives talk about choice," Meier said, "they mean that private enterprise and the marketplace are better and that public institutions are, by their nature, inferior. We need to dismiss the idea that the concept of choice has anything to do with such proposals. They are not about choice at all. They are about privatization and a means to get rid of public education...People who are not concerned with equity will use choice inequitably."

What a choice.

Volume 6, No. 3; Volume 7, Nos. 1-5

p. 1

[illegible], p.

[illegible]'s Harlem Park

School

*Vol. 7, No. 5, May 1995, p. 6*

**EXPECTATIONS**

[illegible]ville's Iroquois Middle School Finds Happy Ending in Greek Tragedy
*[illegible] 7, No. 1, Sept. 1994, p. 10*

San Diego's O'Farrell Community School, Student Portfolio is Ticket to Graduation
*Vol. 7, No. 2, Nov. 1994, p. 3*

Socrates Lives Through Alaska Paideia Project
*Vol. 7, No. 3, Jan. 1995, p. 10*

Student Court: Long Beach's Lindbergh Middle School Students Strike Gavel for Justice
*Vol. 7, No. 4, March 1995, p. 10*

Blues in the Schools, Chattanooga
*Vol. 7, No. 5, May 1995, p. 10*

**MATH**

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Content Standards
*Vol. 7, No. 4, March 1995, p. 1*

Urban Schools Open Doors to Algebra
*Vol. 7, No. 4, March 1995, p. 6*

QUASAR Math Project Taps Potential of Urban Students
*Vol. 7, No. 4, March 1995, p. 8*

**READING/WRITING**

Nation's Writing Report Card Better, Still Off the Mark
*Vol. 7, No. 1, Sept. 1994, p. 14*

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Teacher Education Misses the Middle
*Vol. 7, No. 2, Nov. 1994, p. 1*

Staff Training Gets a Second Look
*Vol. 7, No. 2, Nov. 1994, p. 6*

Louisville Teachers Reborn as Lifelong Students
*Vol. 7, No. 2, Nov. 1994, p. 7*

Teachers Try Out National Certification
*Vol. 7, No. 2, Nov. 1994, p. 10*

Teachers as Scholars Program
*Vol. 7, No. 5, May 1995, p. 8*

**TECHNOLOGY**

Urban Schools Lose Speed in the Technology Race
*Vol. 7, No. 3, Jan. 1995, p. 1*

Aiming the Power of Technology at Student Achievement
*Vol. 7, No. 3, Jan. 1995, p. 3*

Transformations Project Pairs Teachers with Math and Science Mentors
*Vol. 7, No. 3, Jan. 1995, p. 6*



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# Resources

Jingletown Charter Middle School, 2601 East 9th Street, Oakland, CA 94601. Clementina Duron, principal. TEL: 510-532-6751.

Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 4665 Lampson Ave., Los Alamitos, CA 90720. Contact Marcella Dianda. TEL: 310-598-7661.

The Center for Education Reform, 1001 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Suite 920, Washington, DC 20036. Jeanne Allen, president. Publishes literature on school choice including "Nine Lies About School Choice: Answering the Critics." TEL: 202-822-9000.

National Association for Charter Schools, 2722 East Michigan, Suite 201, Lansing, MI 48912. Contact: Greg Morris. TEL: 517-772-9115.

Blues in the Schools, 3 Queen St., Charleston, SC 29401. Mary T. Feldman, executive director. TEL: 803-723-0808. FAX: 803-723-9454.

Harlem Park Community School, 1500 Harlem Ave., Baltimore, MD 21217. TEL: 410-396-0612. Wyatt Coger, principal.

Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), 1300 Norwest Center, 7900 Xerxes Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55431. TEL: 612-832-0092. In Baltimore, contact Patrice Martin at 410-669-3121.

"False Choices: Why School Vouchers Threaten Our Children's Future," a 40-page special issue of Rethinking Schools, 1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212. Single copies $3 plus $2 postage. TEL: 414-964-9646.

American Council of Learned Societies, 228 E. 45th St., New York, NY 10017-3398. Michael Holzman, program officer for education. TEL: 212-697-1505, ext. 139.

**Corrections / Clarifications**

The January/February issue of High Strides included an incorrect reference in the Resources section for technology. John Cradler and Ruthmary Cordon-Cradler of Educational Support Systems, not Far West Regional Educational Laboratories, are the publishers of "Destination Tomorrow: An Atlas for Technology Use in Education" ($40), "Educator's Guide for Developing and Funding Educational Technology Solutions" ($39) and other books. Orders should include 10 percent extra for shipping and handling. TEL: 415-344-7046. FAX: 415-344-3604. e-mail: cradler@carlnet.com.

PHOTOS BY DAVID L. FORE

*Cover photo: Clementina Duron, principal at Jingletown Charter Middle School, stands in front of her school.*

*Top: A Jingletown student walks to class outside one of the school's two portables.*

*Bottom: Jorge Aguilar, [illegible]*

**JINGLETOWN** Continued from page 1

The result: a new middle school, one supported by public tax dollars but which is free to establish its own curriculum, student evaluations, class sizes and school hours. Under California's charter school legislation, Jingletown also can hire and fire its staff and manage its own budget. Jingletown receives about $3,100 per pupil per year — the same base allotment that other Oakland public schools receive. But unlike other public schools, Jingletown also must cover the costs of its building, insurance and a third-party audit.

Jingletown has elected not to pay for support services other than an administrative assistant who does everything from office work to janitorial services. Duron often answers the school telephone. And as with many charter schools, Jingletown parents share some of the responsibility for the school, volunteering a minimum of four hours a month.

Duron, whose office doubles as the teacher's conference room, supply closet, copy machine alcove and counseling room, said organizers had "a mad scramble to get the physical plant ready for the first day of school. Even when the portables were ready, the sewer system was not, so we had to bring ten kids at a time and go knocking at the doors of homes to ask whether we could use their restrooms."

What compelled Jingletown residents and staff to donate their time to a fledgling charter school under such trying circumstances? For the most part, they were driven by the same issues that have led to the creation of charter schools around the country: freedom from confining rules and regulations and the promise of a better education.

Charters usually are initiated and operated by teachers, parents and community members through an agreement between the school's organizers and its sponsor, often a local school board. (States such as Colorado allow petitioners to appeal directly to the state board of education.) Like most public schools, charter schools receive funding based on their enrollments, but they are exempt from most school district regulations. In exchange for this limited autonomy, charter schools generally must be more accountable for student performance. And many school districts, including Oakland, retain the right to revoke school charters at any time.

Jean Quan, an Oakland school board member, said she is encouraged by Jingletown's experiment.

"I have seen and been part of a lot of experiments in education, and I've found that so long as the staff, parents and community really work together, anything can succeed. And so far, that's what's happening at Jingletown under Duron's direction."

Still, Quan has some concerns. She cited the decision by the Los Angeles Unified School District last December to pull the plug on Edutrain, a special charter school for dropouts that ran up nearly $1 million in debts and failed to meet its achievement goals. Quan said she also is uneasy about the ambiguous relationship between a charter school and its "mother district."

"The law is not very clear about to what degree the school board is responsible for the success of the charter school," she said. "Clearly, Oakland has a stake in Jingletown's success, but how do you lay the needs of a charter school against those of regular schools? The church wants to reclaim its land soon — where will Jingletown go?"

So far, about 140 charter schools have formed nationwide, and 11 states have passed charter school legislation. With 73 charter schools operating and 26 more about to open, California is at the forefront of the charter school movement. Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, an advocacy group based in Washington, DC, said "educators look at people like Clementina Duron at Jingletown and say to themselves, 'If she could do it with so few resources, then maybe we can, too.'"

Jingletown is one of the few urban middle schools in California to gain a



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charter. According to a study of California charter schools released last year by the Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Los Alamitos, CA, most charter schools have sprouted in suburban and rural areas. Marcella Dianda and Ronald Corwin, co-authors of the study, found that smaller school districts tend to have smaller bureaucracies and weaker unions, which present fewer obstacles to the formation of charter schools. The report did not evaluate the performance of California charter schools.

At Jingletown, supporters wanted to ensure that neighborhood children who had been held back in school because of language problems would be able to hone their English skills while receiving grade-level instruction in other subjects. The Jingletown board — which consists of five parents, four community residents, one staff member and one student — hired the school staff. The board also adopted a school uniform to reduce the presence of gang colors and identifying insignias.

A major concern for charter schools is staffing. Many local teachers' unions actively oppose charter school legislation and implementation, fearing that teachers ultimately will pay the price for innovation. Indeed, because of scarce funds and the lack of long-term security, the provisions of most charters place teachers at risk of losing their seniority, tenure and even retirement benefits. Jingletown has been unable to recruit a single full-time teacher from the Oakland Public School District. Its staff consists of teachers who worked at schools outside the district, served as substitutes or were on leave from their regular teaching assignments.

But the flexibility of charter schools works to the advantage of some teachers. Maria Martinez, for example, a tenured teacher on unpaid leave from the Oakland Public School District, teaches a two-hour literature and social studies class each day at Jingletown, which suits her just fine.

"Part-time teaching is usually frowned upon, but right now it's all I have time for," she said. "So by hiring me, Jingletown gets a teacher who is fresh every day, and my schedule is accommodated...But in March they (Oakland) will ask me if I want to return. If I say no, I could lose my tenure."

Finding appropriate curriculum and student assessment models also has been a problem at Jingletown, just as it has at many other urban middle schools with diverse student populations.

"We have had some luck finding collaborative and challenging curricula," Duron said, "but we still don't have a bead on standardized tests that will be fair to our students."

Skeptics of charter schools, including Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, have expressed concern that students who later transfer to traditional schools might lag behind. Others have wondered about students who graduate and then must attend a traditional high school across town. Will those students stumble when they no longer receive the personal attention that small schools like Jingletown offer?

"The short answer to such objections is that we want our charter to grow to encompass a high school as well," Duron said. "But whatever happens, our goal and my belief is that our students will be dynamite, they will be successful and they will be happy. They are being trained to be achievers, and they are learning academic skills and social skills they probably would not learn elsewhere." ■

*David Livingstone Fore is an Oakland-based writer and photographer.*

*Duron laughs with eighth-grade students Paloma Rivera, left, and Vanessa Rodriguez, right.*

**"I have seen and been part of a lot of experiments in education, and I've found that so long as the staff, parents and community really work together, anything can succeed."**

**— Jean Quan, Oakland school board member**

# THE TEST

# Baltimore's Harlem Community School Reins Over to Corp

*By Karin Chenoweth*

BALTIMORE — Seated side-by-side at tables, the seventh- and eighth-grade students at Harlem Park Community School took a state writing test one Wednesday in January. Some fidgeted, some jostled, and some giggled over private jokes. But most looked "focused," in the words of principal Wyatt Coger.

Policy-makers in Baltimore and the nation will be scrutinizing Harlem Park's test results in the coming months, which is why Coger anxiously toured the school on test day and why students spend two hours every week taking practice tests. The test results will help answer the question of whether the private company running the school, Minneapolis-based Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), has helped students achieve more than they would in a traditional public school or whether, as one Baltimore politician says, it just does "the same job with more money."

Three years ago, Baltimore agreed to turn over nine of its schools (eight elementary schools and one middle school) to EAI for five years, in one of the first of what was touted to be private salvage operations of public schools. EAI and other companies have argued that outside management expertise and freedom from public school bureaucracies would enable them to do more with less money.

EAI subcontracts with separate building management, computer and accounting companies to provide school support services, but EAI remains in charge of the educational program at its schools. Teachers and principals are considered employees of the local public school system and keep their collective bargaining rights. In Baltimore, the teachers' union initially supported the EAI contract because members were intrigued by many of the company's promises. The union has since withdrawn that support because of new concerns, including the training of teacher interns and treatment of special-education students.

EAI promises clean, safe schools with lower student-teacher ratios, plenty of technology and a curriculum invigorated by the Tesseract teaching method, which emphasizes hands-on learning activities and student-centered classrooms. All this will result, EAI promises, in lower absenteeism rates, higher test scores and less public money being spent.

But in Baltimore, EAI has received $1-2 million more per school than what was allocated before the company stepped in. And great confusion surrounded last year's test scores, which were initially reported as higher but which turned out to be lower than before EAI took over.

Those situations have prompted greater scrutiny from Baltimore politicians, notably Carl Stokes, chairman of the city council's education committee, who is pushing for new accountability measures in the city's contract with the company. Stokes also set up a fact-finding commission recently to investigate EAI's performance in Baltimore. His preliminary assessment: "At best they're doing the same job with more money. But they promised to do a better job with less money."

Two visits to the middle school part of the K-8 Harlem Park Community School showed a clean school with waxed floors and inspirational slogans posted in the hallways and classrooms, all of which Coger believes contribute to an environment that is conducive to learning. Coger, who came to Harlem Park after having served as principal in three Baltimore elementary schools, gives EAI high marks for providing the resources he needs.

"For the first time," he said, "someone has asked me, 'What do you need?'"

When Coger arrived at Harlem Park, for example, he and the teachers decided they wanted to reorganize the school. He no sooner made his pitch than EAI hired an expert on magnet programs to work as a full-time consultant. Now the 1,400 students in sixth through eighth grades are divided into four communities, each with its own focus — arts and humanities; business; science and math; and communications and technology. Telephones in the classrooms and four computer labs represent other resources that EAI has put into the school.

"Nowhere in my lifetime would I have gotten those computers" without EAI, Coger said.

Computers are one of the keys to EAI's Tesseract method, which promises individualized programs, provided by EAI's partner company, Computer Curriculum Corporation, to help children master math and reading. Although EAI claims the program is "award-winning," critics have said it has not been properly tested and proven.



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# orate Team

In one Harlem Park computer lab, where students spend a half hour twice a week, the middle-schoolers were working on math problems such as 47 + 15, interspersed with word recognition and reading comprehension problems. One screen showed the text from an aspirin bottle label and asked the student to identify the ailment for which the medicine might be used.

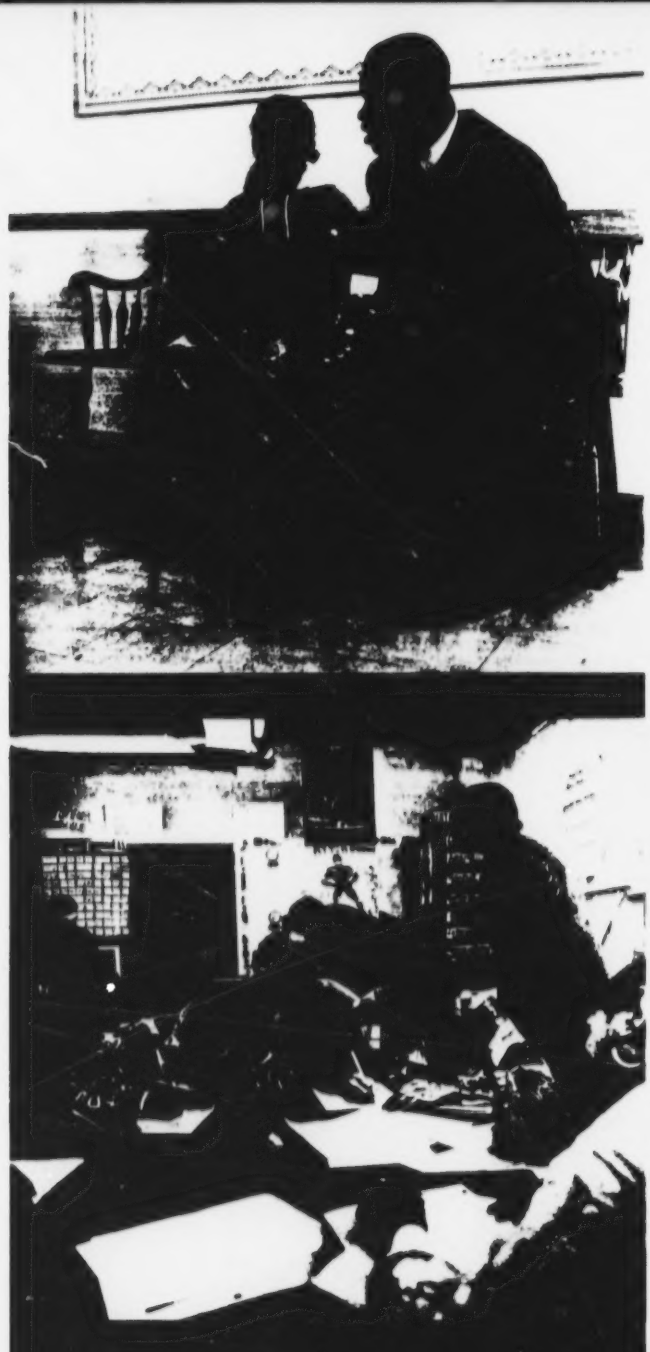
"Boring and repetitive," are the words her twin daughters use to describe the computer program, said Denise Briscoe. Briscoe said she is otherwise pleased with EAI for running a clean, safe school with "good communication with teachers and principal." Still, she acknowledged that her daughters, both eighth-graders, are "learning the same thing as every other child in Baltimore," despite promises by EAI that the school would be different, including having more adults in every classroom.

Those extra adults, or educational interns as they are called by EAI, were billed as another key component for success. EAI promised that each classroom would have two college graduates — a certified teacher and an intern. EAI, through the use of a provisional certification process, has provided opportunities for unconventional instructors to join the staff including a former roadie with Billy Joel and the Rolling Stones who teaches theater technology, a professional actor who works as an intern in a speech and drama class and a former director of an Audubon Society youth program who teaches her own elementary class.

However, the low pay for interns ($8 an hour with no benefits) has resulted in high staff turnover, which means that not all classes of 30 to 40 students have two adults at all times. Teaching intern Weldon Freeman, for example, quit after four months, in part to seek a "more lucrative field" and because he thought the discipline problems at Harlem Park were overwhelming.

"It's like a damn zoo," he said. "With my lack of training I didn't feel I could jump in with the inclusion kids."

**PRIVATIZATION** Continued on page 12



*Left: Lapretta Brooks, a sixth-grader at Harlem Park Community School in Baltimore, reaches for materials to complete a project.*

*Top: Dr. Audrey Bunday, right, an administrator at Harlem Park Community School, gets assistance from fourth-grader Darnell A. Palmer, left.*

*Bottom: Margaret Mary Hayes observes her students at Harlem Park Community School.*

PHOTOS BY MARY ANN CHASE

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# The TEACHER is SCHOLAR:

## National Program Gives Teachers Year-Long Sabbaticals to Study, Reflect, Write

*By Priscilla Pardini*

Milwaukee middle school teacher Deb Pattee is completing what she considers one of the best years of her professional life.

Along with 11 other teachers from her school district, Pattee has been released from her regular job to go back to school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

"It's been wonderful — almost unreal," said Pattee, a seventh-grade social studies teacher at Parkman Middle School. "Every teacher is a scholar, but when you're in the trenches every day you don't have the opportunity to pursue knowledge even though you want it."

Like Pattee, about 100 other teacher-fellows nationwide, in grades K-12, have been able to step back from their day-to-day responsibilities during the last three years to pursue a year of focused academic study. Their sponsor: the Elementary and Secondary Teacher Curriculum Development Project of the American Council of Learned Societies, a New York-based non-profit federation of national scholarly organizations dedicated to the advancement of humanistic studies in all fields of learning.

The project, better known as the Teacher as Scholar Program, aims to support humanities teaching in public schools through school district-university partnerships. Teams of teachers in participating districts submit curriculum proposals and determine what they need to know to turn the proposals into units of study. Winning teams designate one member as a teacher-fellow who receives a year-long sabbatical at a local university. Pattee, for example, is developing a multicultural curriculum focusing on the Holocaust, Native American culture and historical patterns of discrimination that takes into account multiple intelligences — the various ways that students learn.

The teacher-fellows have access to all university courses and resources. Along with other fellows from their school district, they attend regular seminars led by university faculty. They work closely with team members at their schools to ensure that what they learn filters back to the middle school curriculum. And they attend national conferences sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies.

Connie Blair, a 25-year teaching veteran who works at Audubon Middle School in Milwaukee, said the Teacher as Scholar Program has revived the "kind of drive I had when I was a beginning" teacher to go out and develop new strategies, come up with new ideas.

Blair, an English teacher whose research has focused on project and performance portfolios for humanities themes, said that "as a teacher, you're so



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locked in during the normal school day. But we're allowed to dream, to visualize, to plan, to reform."

Sandra Blackman, a 1992-93 fellow who teaches social studies and English at Marston Middle School in San Diego, agreed, saying the experience was rejuvenating.

"Teachers tend to lose their scholarship," she said. "It will just drift away from you, and you don't realize you've lost it until you get back to the university."

The sabbatical privileges can lead to some jealousy among those teachers who have to stay behind in the public school classrooms. But for the most part, the teacher-scholars said they have encountered little resentment from their colleagues because of the recognition that they have put in long hours for the benefit of the whole school.

Michael Holzman, program officer for education at the American Council of Learned Societies, said he hopes that scholars gain a new appreciation for the important role that research and inquiry play in education.

"But the idea isn't so much that you go to the university for a year and get all filled up," he added. "Rather, it's that after working for a year on things you find interesting, you're more likely — presumably, for the rest of your career — to say 'I need to find this out, so I'll go over to the university and look it up on the database or talk to somebody.'"

Holzman believes that by staying current in their fields and interacting with other professionals, teachers also will be more likely to be involved in developing curriculum — instead of leaving it up to someone from the central office.

Beverly Anderson Parsons, executive director of InSites, a non-profit organization based in Ft. Collins, CO, that monitors school reform efforts, has evaluated the Teacher as Scholar program. While not a panacea, Parsons said the program has provided teachers with "a depth of understanding that is unlike most other reform efforts."

"This is not just in-service," she said.

Teacher as Scholar, a three-year, $5 million project, is supported by several foundations, including the Pew Charitable Trusts and the DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund. Holzman said the council is seeking funding to run the program for another three years, beginning in September 1996. Participating school districts and universities agree to provide matching funds. Holzman estimated a district's cost at half the salary of a long-term substitute teacher, or about $10,000 per teaching team. In addition, the district must continue to pay the teacher-scholar's salary and benefits.

Besides Milwaukee, this year's participants included the Cambridge and Brookline (MA) public schools in partnership with Harvard University; the Colorado Educational Partnership, a statewide consortium that includes public schools, universities and community colleges, in partnership with the University of Colorado at Boulder; the British Columbia (Canada) Consortium for Humanities and Social Sciences, a coalition of schools near Vancouver, in partnership with the University of British Columbia. Schools in Los Angeles, Minneapolis and San Diego also participated during the first two years of the program.

The team projects have varied. In Colorado, for example, teachers developed curriculum integrating social studies, foreign languages and the arts. Minneapolis participants explored race and gender issues. Some of the new curriculum developed by the British Columbia teams focused on the uses of biography.

The logistics also vary from district to district, although each must guarantee that the teacher-scholars can return to their regular teaching jobs the following school year. In Milwaukee, teachers spent about 20 percent of their time working with team members in their schools. In San Diego, teachers were expected to spend one-third of their time at their schools and another third sharing their knowledge with teachers at other district schools.

Blackman, the Marston Middle School teacher, focused on art history and multicultural literature. Two years later, she believes that her experience has had a lasting impact on her and her colleagues.

"We wrote a unit on westward expansion using literature from the non-European point of view that I brought back from my year of study," she said. "It was incredibly powerful to see that knowledge going directly to teachers in the classroom." ■

*Priscilla Pardini is a Milwaukee-based education writer.*

*Left: Connie Blair, a teacher at Audubon Middle School in Milwaukee, discusses an art project with team members Michael Bakula and Margarette Spears.*

*Top: Mary Delgado, a teacher at Edison Middle School in Milwaukee, was a participant in the 1994-1995 Teacher as Scholar program.*

*Bottom: Connie Blair, who teaches English at Audubon Middle School, used her sabbatical to research performance portfolios for humanities themes.*

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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

*By Aïda Rogers*

# BLUES in the Schools Plays a Sweet Note of Success

A sixth-grader and always in trouble. That was Shawn Leatherman, a 14-year-old mischief-maker who was failing most of his classes and getting suspended from Chattanooga Middle School, Phoenix 2, about once a week. That is, until he got the blues.

Now Shawn plays the harmonica and hopes to form a blues band with his father. And Shawn and his mother have been getting good reports from his teachers for the first time in anyone's memory.

The reason: Blues in the Schools, an after-school program that helps middle school students learn about the history and performance of a musical tradition that traces its roots to African-American slavery and inspired nearly every style of modern American music. Modeled after a program in Chicago, Blues in the Schools gives urban middle school students positive adult role models, an artistic outlet and something fun to do after school.

During a typical four- to six-week session of Blues in the Schools, students work with professional musicians to write and sing blues lyrics, learn to play the harmonica and perform during a concert. Besides music, the program includes dance, visual arts and photojournalism lessons — all of which occur after school. During the school day, teachers can incorporate blues lessons into the regular curriculum. Social studies classes can discuss slavery, plantation life and urban migration, for example, while language arts classes pick up the writings of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, and art classes can focus on African mask-making and beadwork.

"Middle school students are turned on by music," said Edna Varner, principal of Phoenix 2, which used grants to pay for 90 students from two Chattanooga middle schools to participate in Blues in the Schools earlier this year.

"They like to move. They like to be uninhibited. And music gives them license to be middle school kids — to be animated, to be creative, to do all those things that I think middle school kids are all about. Unfortunately, school doesn't always lend itself to their special gifts."

Blues in the Schools builds on the belief that some middle school students may need to discover their talents, their self-esteem and their self-control through unconventional means. Co-founder Mary Feldman, a Charleston, SC, businesswoman, developed the program in 1991 after talking to middle school students who often walked past her business, King Street Palace, an entertainment complex, in the middle of the day.

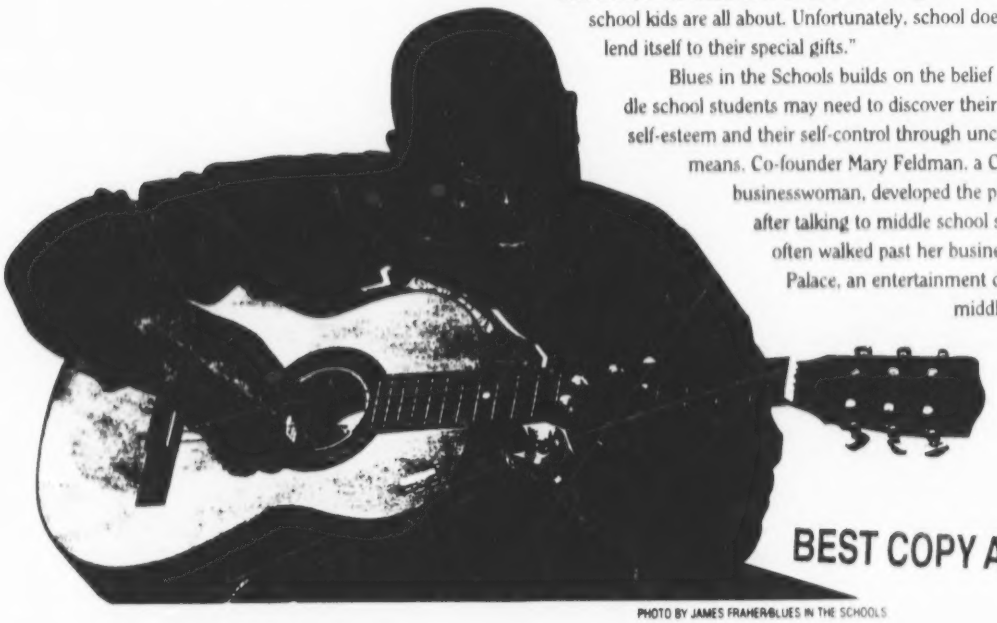

PHOTO BY JAMES FRAHER/BLUES IN THE SCHOOLS

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PHOTO BY LARK JOHNSON/BLUES IN THE SCHOOLS

*Left: Joshua Littlejohn, a student at Dubose Middle School in Summerville, SC, played a tune on the guitar during a Blues in the Schools performance last year.*

*Top: Tawanna Scott, left, and Gwen Gandy, right, students at Malcolm X Academy in Milwaukee, performed a dance they had for a Blues in the Schools residency. Courtesy of Milwaukee Public Schools*

*Bottom: Students Danielle Bateman, left, and Dana Martin played the harmonica during a Blues in the Schools performance at Tennessee's Chattanooga Middle School Program. Courtesy of the YWCA*

"We just noticed so many problems with the kids," Feldman said. "They were angry and frustrated and a lot of them would get expelled from school. We'd find them sitting on the dumpster, and we'd ask, 'Why aren't you in school?' and they'd say, 'Well, my mother isn't home, and my father, I don't know who he is.' You hear about all these problems, but when you talk to them, it really hits home."

The pain that middle school students experience is reflected in the blues lyrics they write, such as these stanzas written by students at Parkman Middle School and Malcolm X Academy in Milwaukee: "I can't remember when so many people had the blues/They're dying everyday, and they don't even have a clue...It's a desperate situation. Time ain't very long/If we don't get ourselves together, soon we will be gone."

Since it began with Charleston's Rivers Middle School in 1991, Blues in the Schools has expanded to five other middle schools in Charleston and to schools in Chattanooga and Milwaukee, with several other cities scheduled to come on board in the near future. The cost of a four-week program, which is based on the number of participating students, ranges from about $12,500 for just the curriculum and teacher training to about $55,000 for a full package that also includes instruments, assistance from professional musicians and a final concert. Blues in the Schools will help districts raise money for the program.

In Chattanooga, Varner said she wanted her school — 80 percent of its students black, and most of them poor — to provide more exciting, hands-on activities for adolescents and help them understand and celebrate their heritage. She believes that when students get excited about something in school, their grades, attendance and attitudes improve. A poetry lover, Varner thought that the arts might be the ticket. The first year proved so successful that Varner said she's committed to finding funding so that the program can continue on a monthly basis.

Despite producing impressive results with many students, Blues in the Schools doesn't work miracles. Barbara Elwood, assistant principal at Courtenay Middle School in Charleston and formerly an administrator at Rivers Middle School, said she's a fan of Blues in the Schools. She believes the program improves students' self-esteem and exposes them to other lifestyles. In Charleston, for example, the program brings together students from urban, rural and suburban schools to practice and perform together.

But Elwood said most of the students at Rivers who participated in Blues in the Schools were already achievers who had an interest in band or chorus. Rarely, she said, did a truant student join in.

"Everybody wants to know if this is a panacea for the at-risk child," Elwood said. "It is not. When you're in the trenches with these children, the problems are so complex. Everybody thinks they've got the answer, and nobody has the answer because it is not a simple equation."

Blues in the Schools may not be a panacea, but Mary Leatherman knows that something worked for her son, Shawn. The program helped him gain attention that wasn't linked to his bad behavior, she said. And participating in Blues in the Schools gave Shawn something better to do after school than hang out on the streets with neighborhood punks, she said.

"I think a lot of it was that there were these big-name musicians, and they were taking the time with him even though he didn't even play an instrument when he started," Leatherman said. "All of a sudden, it was like everybody was giving him a chance. He seen that chance, and he took it."

And Shawn, who recently walked away from a fight by telling the other student "he wasn't worth it," said he enjoys being a different kind of performer in school.

"I got tired of being bad," he said. ■

*Aida Rogers is writer-at-large for* Sandlapper, The Magazine of South Carolina.

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**PRIVATIZATION** Continued from page 7

students with special needs who have been brought into the regular classrooms from self-contained classes.

Harlem Park administrators praise inclusion, saying that as many as 40 percent of students at the school previously had carried special-education labels.

"They called them Dumb Educated Child," said Dr. Andrey Bundley, a Harlem Park administrator, referring to the state Department of Exceptional Children (DEC) designation. Now that the students are in regular classrooms, he said, they "don't feel that stigma."

But one teacher, who asked not to be identified, disagreed with Bundley's assessment: "They're treating our special-education kids horribly. They're dumping them in the classrooms."

She said that special-education teachers, who are supposed to help in the classrooms to modify the curriculum and work with the special-needs children, often attend meetings or complete paperwork outside the classroom instead.

The U.S. Department of Education last year cited Harlem Park for not meeting special-education requirements. And EAI also was rebuked by the Maryland Department of Education for paying part of its legal bills with money provided by the federal Chapter I program, which is supposed to provide instruction to students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Problems with special education and staffing, and confusion over finances and test scores, mean that EAI has a lot to gain or lose by the next set of reports, including the state test scores. The results will help answer the question of whether privatization can work in public schools. ■

*Karin Chenoweth is an education writer based in Silver Spring, MD.*

# news to use

**The Council of Independent Colleges has published an 80-page booklet of summer academic programs that includes about 28 different opportunities for middle-grades students. "Summer Adventure: 1995 Directory of Summer Opportunities for Minority Pre-College Students" includes brief descriptions and eligibility requirements for programs offered at 160 private colleges and universities nationwide. Some programs are restricted to students from the state or community near the college.**

**Some examples of free, non-restrictive offerings: Saint Norbert College in De Pere, WI, sponsors a 15-day program in mathematics for 30 Native American students who will enter eighth grade in the fall. College faculty will work with the students during the regular school year to insure that they continue their studies in mathematics; The College of the Southwest in Hobbs, NM, hosts Success 2000, a 10-day leadership camp for students in fourth, fifth and sixth grades. The program stresses the development of critical-thinking, leadership and problem-solving skills; Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, IN, offers a one-week program to help Hispanic girls ages 14-17 set high career goals and improve their academic skills; and Wittenberg University in Springfield, OH, sponsors a one-week enrichment program for students in grades six through eight. Need-based scholarships are available.**

**The Council has a limited number of free, single copies of the directory. For more information, contact The Council of Independent Colleges, One Dupont Circle, Suite 320, Washington, DC 20036. TEL: 202-466-7230.**

**Six urban school districts have received one-year, $200,000 grants from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to revise academic standards for what middle school students should know and be able to do by the time they leave the eighth grade. The school districts — some of whom have won previous Clark grants to reform middle schools — include the San Diego Unified School District and Long Beach Unified School District in California; Chattanooga Public Schools in Tennessee; Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY; Corpus Christi Independent School District in Texas; and Minneapolis Special School District #1 in Minnesota.**

**The Clark Foundation also awarded $30,000 to the Academy for Educational Development, Inc. in Washington, DC, to gauge the interest among urban school districts for establishing a national consortium of organizations dedicated to middle school reform.**

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# NMSA 5th Annual Middle Level Urban Initiatives Conference

**Presenter Application ENCLOSED**

**Deadline is June 1, 1995.**

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# YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED

**to submit a presentation request to the NMSA 5th Annual Middle Level Urban Initiatives Conference in Mobile, Alabama, February 1-3, 1996. Each year NMSA receives hundreds of applications to present at the Urban Conference. We applaud the willingness of educators and others to share their insights and expertise on urban issues with their colleagues.**

## SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Presenters serve on a contributing basis and are required to register for the urban conference. As contributors, presenters are not reimbursed for lodging, travel, audiovisual, or conference registration.

## APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

The NMSA Urban Issues Committee will read applications as a juried process. The committee may edit information for space and clarity. Applicants will be notified of their proposal's status after the committee's evaluation of all entries. Proposals must follow these guidelines:

- Develop the proposal to represent urban issues
- Make sure the proposal is relevant and significant to middle level education
- Clearly describe the goals and focus of the proposal
- Describe the relevant intended audience: e.g., beginning teachers, advanced teachers, administrators, professors, etc.
- Make sure the title reflects the content of the proposal
- Pejorative references and discriminatory comments will not be accepted under any circumstances

The Urban Issues Committee is committed to choosing presenters from a broad spectrum of geographical, racial, ethnic, and professional groups. Presenters, therefore, cannot be guaranteed continuing slots on the program even though past sessions may have been well received. Should this happen, please consider applying to present at the 1997 Urban Conference.

Selections for the Urban Conference will be made by August 1995. Information regarding the status of applications will not be available until then; at that time, letters will be mailed to all who submitted proposals with the Urban Issues Committee's decision relative to the status of the proposal.

**SEND 8 COPIES** of your application including the original to:

National Middle School Association
2600 Corporate Exchange Drive
Suite 370
Columbus, OH 43231-1672

## GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING THE APPLICATION

All information must be typewritten in the space provided on the application form. Handwritten applications will not be accepted. Do not add lines to the form or attach supplemental materials. The Urban Issues Committee will consider only the information contained within the space provided. Presenters should not submit more than 2 presentations or include themselves as a co-presenter on more than 2 proposals.

**Deadline for application is June 1, 1995.**

## PRESENTATION

Abstracts must be clear and concise. Describe the focus and goals of the presentation. Those presentations that contain negative references based on ethnicity, gender, age, sexual preference, and beliefs will not be considered. Please make sure the title reflects the content of the session. NMSA reserves the right to edit abstracts and titles for clarity and/or space limitation.

## AV Requests

Overhead projectors and screens are provided in all meeting rooms (presenters provide their own transparencies and markers). Upon acceptance of your application, NMSA will forward an AV request form which will include several different packages. Please indicate your choice of additional AV and include payment, if required.

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# NMSA 5th Annual Middle Level Urban Initiatives Conference

**February 1-3, 1995 ■ Mobile, Alabama**

**Presenter Application**

| NMSA use only | |
|---|---|
| Control # _____ | Session # _____ |
| Room _____ | |
| Day _____ | Time _____ |

## Primary Presenter Information

Name _____

School/Organization _____ Position _____

Work Address (this address will appear in the program book) _____

City _____ State/Province _____ Country _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Telephone (w) (  ) _____ (h) (  ) _____ FAX (  ) _____ ☐ Exhibitor

Home/Summer Address (all mailings will be sent to this address) _____

City _____ State/Province _____ Country _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

## Representation

For NMSA to assure a balanced representation in planning future activities, please indicate your ethnic/racial background. (optional)

☐ Native American ☐ African-American ☐ Caucasian
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander ☐ Hispanic ☐ Other _____

Please indicate your geographic location:

☐ Large Urban ☐ Small Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Other: Describe _____

## Presentation

**Title** _____

Abstract (In the space below, TYPE your presentation abstract in narrative form as you wish it to appear in the conference program. Please limit your description to 100 words or less and include an overall objective(s) of your session.)

1. Presentation Method
   - ☐ Hands On
   - ☐ Lecture
   - ☐ Discussion
2. Presentation
   - ☐ Individual
   - ☐ Co-presenter
3. About you
   - ☐ First time presenter
   - ☐ I presented at the 1995 NMSA Urban Conference in Milwaukee
   - ☐ I presented at the 1994 NMSA Urban Conference in Chattanooga
4. Indicate level and intended audience
   - ☐ Beginning
   - ☐ Advanced

Audience (i.e., teachers, principals...) _____

## Deadline

**Deadline for presenter applications is June 1, 1995.**

Return 8 copies to NMSA, 2600 Corporate Exchange Drive, Suite 370, Columbus, OH 43231-1672.